

THE FALL OF CONSTANTINOPLE TO THE OTTOMANS

Michael Angold


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THE FALL OF CONSTANTINOPLE TO THE OTTOMANS: CONTEXT AND
CONSEQUENCES

Michael Angold

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Context and Consequences

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Preface

The fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans in 1453 presents similar problems to those I encountered when writing about its previous fall in 1204 to the Venetians and the soldiers of the fourth crusade.¹ Once again, I have avoided a conventional narrative; this time on the grounds that Sir Steven Runciman has made such an approach unnecessary.² I have again preferred to concentrate on the historical significance of the event. Both 1204 and 1453 have come to be seen as turning points in history. If they were, then it was in very different ways. 1204 was one of those few events which changed the course of history. If anything illustrates the role of the contingent in history it is the story of the fourth crusade. When it set sail from Venice, its outcome was only ever the remotest of remote possibilities, but far more momentous were its consequences. It allowed the conquerors to dismantle the system of political control exercised from Constantinople and in doing so to destroy it as an imperial metropolis. In its place there emerged a commercial network dominated by Venice and Genoa, which ensured political fragmentation and condemned a restored Byzantine Empire to impotence. By way of contrast, the fall of the city in 1453 was long overdue and only gave clearer definition to the established fact of Ottoman supremacy. It meant among other things a final reversal of the consequences of 1204, for it put an end to Italian commercial domination and restored Constantinople to its role as an imperial metropolis, but now under Ottoman auspices. In the process, Byzantium ceased to be, which may explain why contemporary opinion found 1453 so shocking. It made far more of an impact than did the earlier fall of Constantinople. The destruction of Byzantium in 1453 marked the passing of an era in a way that the previous fall of the city had not. The crusaders may have crippled Byzantium and made its full recovery impossible, but they failed to destroy it. In a sense, they gave it a new lease on life, as Byzantine scholars and ecclesiastics sought in exile to preserve the essentials of Byzantine civilisation, which were threatened by the Latin occupation of Constantinople. It fuelled a Byzantine resurgence, which drove the Latins from

Constantinople in 1261. If this did not mean a return to political ascendancy, it did produce a sustained intellectual and spiritual revival, which did much to preserve Constantinople's prestige and symbolic importance. Nothing like this happened after 1453. What was the point in seeking to reverse what was deemed inevitable! Little effort was made to preserve Byzantine civilisation. Hopes of a Byzantine recovery remained in the realm of myth and fantasy. Despite the political weakness of the declining Byzantine Empire its disappearance created a void, which was quickly filled, as others appropriated different facets of Byzantium. Its role as the guardian of classical antiquity went to the West; the Ottomans assumed its imperial destiny, while the Russians reshaped its political ideology. The final fall of Constantinople therefore became a central point of reference for a complicated process of creating identities and ideologies to fit new realities. Whether it was the Greek search for a new identity now that they were condemned to live as exiles in their own land; whether it was the transmutation of the notion of Christendom into Europe, as happened in the West; whether it was the emergence of the autocratic authority of the Czar at the heart of Holy Russia; or whether it was the elevation of the Ottoman Empire to the rank of a world power, all were set in relief by the conquest of Constantinople, whence the attention it attracted among contemporaries. Herein lies its real historical importance.

Writing this book has taken much longer than I expected; much longer than it should have, but without Simin Abrahams's help and encouragement I don't think I would ever have been able to finish this book.

Notes

- 1 M.J. Angold, *The Fourth Crusade: Event and Context* (Harlow: Pearson/Longman, 2003).
- 2 S. Runciman, *The Fall of Constantinople, 1453* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965).

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CHAPTER 1

The fall of Constantinople as a turning point

The fall of Constantinople is a story that has often been told. It is Sir Steven Runciman who tells the story best in his *Fall of Constantinople 1453*, which is a consummate example of history as narrative, but even he was beginning to wonder whether the topic merited another book.¹ He did not think that over the details of the siege he had much to add to the account given by Sir Edwin Pears in his *Destruction of the Greek Empire*, which originally appeared in 1903, the year of Runciman's birth.² Runciman's hesitations have not prevented others from undertaking the retelling of the story of the fall of Constantinople. The most recent attempt by M. Philippides and W.K. Hanak is on a massive scale and provides a convincing and detailed reconstruction of the event.³ It is not my intention to provide yet another narrative or to attempt another reconstruction. The focus of my interest will be on the historical significance of the fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans. Was it one of history's turning points? Such an approach will necessarily highlight its prehistory and its consequences, at the expense of the event itself. But it makes little sense to write about the fall of Constantinople without first providing a brief sketch of those desperate days in April and May 1453.

I

The decision taken by the young Sultan Mehmed II (1451–81) to embark on the conquest of Constantinople represented the failure of political arrangements, which for fifty years had allowed Byzantium to survive and to

a degree to prosper. He blamed the Byzantine emperor for the political crisis at the heart of the Ottoman ruling institution, which had overshadowed his boyhood. We are never going to know exactly what the forces were which in 1444 persuaded his father Murad II to abdicate in favour of his son, who was not quite thirteen.⁴ There are, however, pointers, such as rumours that the young Mehmed – or at least the men behind him – were agitating for an attack on Constantinople. There was deep suspicion of the Byzantine emperor, who was blamed for orchestrating a series of Hungarian invasions of the Ottoman Empire, which were only beaten off with great loss of life.⁵ Some at the Ottoman court were beginning to see an independent Constantinople as a threat to security. They also resented the ascendancy exercised over Murad II by his Grand Vezir Çandarlı Halil Pasha, who was an advocate of entente with Byzantium. The conquest of Constantinople will no doubt have appealed to Mehmed II's youthful bravado nurtured by reading about the exploits of Alexander the Great. Encouraging him was a clique at the Ottoman court, which in the search for preferment had attached itself to the young sultan. From the names that we have they seem to have been predominantly from Christian families, but converts to Islam brought up at the Ottoman court. They were slave administrators and represented a new political force, which emerged as an Ottoman central government began to take clearer shape. They had a vested interest in extending the effective authority of the sultan, but were frustrated by Murad II, who preferred to maintain the status quo, ably seconded by his Grand Vezir. His was always the voice of moderation. When in 1437 Sultan Murad II was contemplating a punitive expedition against Constantinople, there was one dissenting voice, that of Halil Pasha. He argued that any attack on Constantinople would throw the emperor into the arms of the Latins. It was better to let matters take their course, since the Ottomans had little to fear, protected as they were by a series of treaties.⁶ His advice prevailed, but it would come back to haunt him, when in 1444 diplomacy failed to protect Ottoman territories from Hungarian invasion. It strengthened his opponents' demand for the conquest of Constantinople.

The question of Constantinople was therefore an issue which polarised opinion at the Ottoman court in the last years of Murad II's reign. Alarmed by the activities of Mehmed II's government, Çandarlı Halil Pasha persuaded Murad II to resume the reins of power in 1446 and to exile his son to Asia Minor. While Murad II lived the question of what to do with Constantinople was put on hold. He was all too aware how radically its conquest would alter the character of the Ottoman 'Empire'. For his son it was another matter. He was in a weak position. His first short reign had damaged his reputation. Once he finally succeeded to the throne in 1451 on the death of his father,

he needed to assert himself against an over-mighty Grand Vezir and to unite Ottoman political society behind him in some grand enterprise. The conquest of Constantinople beckoned.

A change of ruler is always a moment of uncertainty, but Mehmed II was not the only new ruler. In 1448 the Byzantine Emperor John VIII Palaiologos (1425–48) died. His reputation for good or ill hangs on his decision to press ahead with the union of the Latin and Orthodox Churches, which he pushed through in 1439 with great skill and determination at the Council of Ferrara Florence. He hoped that diplomatic success would strengthen Byzantium, which in the short term it appeared to do. He did not live to face further developments. Instead he left an uncertain succession, for which he had made no formal provisions. It was understood that his oldest surviving brother Constantine Drageses would succeed, but the latter was at Mistra in the Peloponnese at some distance from Constantinople. This allowed supporters of his younger brother Demetrios to plot a *coup d'état*, which came to nothing. The people of Constantinople were contemptuous of Demetrios, who had in the past worked too closely with the Ottomans. The regency council under the Empress-Mother formally declared for Constantine Drageses and immediately despatched an envoy to the Ottoman court to inform the sultan of Constantine's accession and to obtain his approval.⁷

Constantine finally arrived in Constantinople on 12 March 1449. He has almost invariably been accorded a good press. He has become the tragic hero of the fall of Constantinople.⁸ A careful examination of his actions as emperor suggests that on balance he made a difficult situation worse. In the months between his brother's death and his arrival at Constantinople opponents of the Union of Churches were able to seize the initiative. Their attacks were directed against the unionist patriarch Gregory Melissenos.⁹ It meant that Constantine Drageses hesitated to proceed to a coronation, because it would have meant endorsing the patriarch and alienating his opponents. The emperor's lack of support for the patriarch contributed to the latter's decision to seek refuge at Rome, which postponed any coronation indefinitely.¹⁰ An uncrowned emperor was an anomaly. Almost as unusual was the emperor's lack of a wife, but there may be a connection between the two, because it had become usual, when a new emperor was widowed or unmarried, to wait until he was married before proceeding with his coronation.¹¹ At the time of his accession Constantine had been a widower for six years. It now became a pressing task to find him a consort. A great deal of diplomatic activity achieved nothing. The princesses approached turned down marriage to the Byzantine emperor; one even threatened to take the veil if forced to go through with it.¹² It suggests many things, but bright prospects are not among them.

In Constantinople the emperor allowed the anti-unionists a more or less free hand, which effectively produced a schism within the Church. Nor was Constantine XI on the best of terms with his chief minister, the Grand Duke Loukas Notaras. He complained to his confidant George Sphrantzes that Notaras always wanted his own way.¹³ The emperor hoped that a forceful foreign policy would compensate for his failings on the domestic front. He tried to loosen the grip the Venetians had on the trade of Constantinople by bringing in the Ragusans as competitors and by requiring Venetian residents to pay local taxes.¹⁴ This merely irritated the Venetians, but at a dangerous hour. It contrasted with the courtesy with which the young Mehmed II received their envoys. Constantine XI saw in the succession of a new ruler to the Ottoman throne a chance to assert himself and made a series of unwise demands, which only revealed the weakness of his position. At the same time his handling of the religious situation at Constantinople so provoked the papacy that it despatched Cardinal Isidore, a Greek by birth, to take control of the situation. He arrived with a small force of armed retainers on 26 October 1452.¹⁵ There was an immediate clamp down on the activities of the anti-unionists and their leader, the monk Gennadios, was placed under house arrest. The Cardinal then proceeded – with the reluctant acquiescence of the emperor – to the long-delayed proclamation of the Union of Churches. This took place on 12 December 1452 in St Sophia.¹⁶ By then it was clear that Mehmed II was preparing to lay siege to Constantinople.

While Loukas Notaras and Halil Pasha were dominant voices at the Byzantine and Ottoman courts respectively, everything was done to avoid outright confrontation over Constantinople. This became more difficult with the accession first of Constantine XI Drageses to the Byzantine throne in 1448 and then of Mehmed II to the Ottoman in 1451. Both rulers found in the struggle for Constantinople a means of asserting themselves against over-mighty chief ministers. At first, Mehmed II proceeded very carefully. He used his Grand Vezir to negotiate a series of treaties with foreign powers, which secured the young sultan's position. On 10 September 1451 peace was renewed with the Venetians; on 20 September a three-year truce was signed with the Hungarians; on 25 September the monks of Mount Athos had their privileges confirmed. Mehmed II was at his friendliest when he received a delegation from the Byzantine Emperor Constantine XI Palaiologos. He not only renewed the treaty which his father had made with the Byzantines two years previously, but also offered the Byzantine emperor an annual sum of 300,000 *akçes* towards the expenses of the Ottoman prince Orhan, who had sought refuge at Constantinople.¹⁷ Because of his willingness to compromise and make concessions during his early months in power Mehmed II

reinforced the impression left over from his brief period of rule some five or six years before that he lacked ability and confidence, but, as the chronicler Doukas observed, he was a wolf in sheep's clothing.¹⁸

Mehmed II's apparent diffidence encouraged some of his Anatolian tributaries to revolt. These domestic troubles seemed just the opportunity the Byzantine emperor needed for a cheap diplomatic coup. He sent emissaries to Mehmed II with a veiled threat that he would release the Ottoman pretender Orhan, if the sultan did not immediately double the annual sum he provided for Orhan's upkeep. It was a demand which outraged that 'friend of the Byzantines' Halil Pasha. He understood only too well that the Byzantine emperor had made a complete miscalculation.¹⁹ He was playing into Mehmed II's hands and making the task of maintaining peace nearly impossible. For the time being the sultan curbed his anger and told the Byzantine emissaries that he was willing to discuss the matter once he was back in Edirne. However, his first action on his return was to cancel the existing grant of revenues destined for Orhan's upkeep and to levy building workers for the construction of a castle on the European shore of the Bosphorus on what was nominally Byzantine territory.

The construction of the fortress of Boğaz Kesen or Rumeli Hisar, as it is now known, between April and August 1452 left nobody in any doubt that Mehmed II was preparing to lay siege to Constantinople, even if its stated purpose was to control the entry and exit of shipping to and from the Black Sea.²⁰ On 25 November 1452 a Venetian ship from the Black Sea, which tried to run the gauntlet of the fortress's artillery, was sunk. Its captain and crew managed to get ashore, where they were captured. The sultan put them on display at Dimotika (the ancient Didymoteichos); then had the crew executed and the captain impaled. Mehmed II was making his intentions all too clear. At least, it gave Constantine XI enough time to make ready the defences of Constantinople. He was able to get together provisions. He gave George Sphrantzes the task of processing the returns made by officers and demarchs of Constantinople of the able-bodied men, including monks, at their disposal. It came to just under 8,000, which sounds pathetically inadequate for the defence of the city.²¹ Foreign residents provided another 2,000 fighting men. Cardinal Isidore contributed his small force of men. On 29 January 1453 Giovanni Giustiniani Longo, a Genoese *condottiere*, arrived with a contingent of 700 Latin mercenaries.²² Small as this was, it was a formidable addition to the defences of the city and Giustiniani was placed in command of the walls around the St Romanos gate. To judge by past experience, the defending forces were now just about adequate to hold Constantinople. Although there was a massive disparity between the Byzantine and Ottoman forces, the

Byzantine emperor had slightly the easier task. It was the difference between holding the walls of Constantinople, which still presented a daunting line of fortification, and storming them. If the initial assaults failed, Mehmed II would have to keep his army together in the face of mounting pressure to raise the siege. This would be no easy task.

Mehmed II had his massive forces in position under the walls of the city by early April 1453. At the same time, a Turkish fleet was patrolling the surrounding waters, intent on preventing any aid coming in by sea. This naval blockade was a major difference, when compared with earlier Ottoman attempts on the city; another was the greater effectiveness of the Ottoman artillery, which had previously done very little damage to the walls of Constantinople. Whether cannon was the decisive factor, which made possible the Ottoman conquest, is another matter. Despite spectacular displays by the Ottoman artillery, the siege did not at first go well for the attackers. On 12 April the Ottoman navy failed to force the chain which barred entry into the Golden Horn. On 18 April the defenders beat off an assault on the land walls with comparative ease. Then two days later a small relief fleet bringing supplies and reinforcements from Chios broke through the Ottoman blockade and reached the safety of the Golden Horn. So far, Mehmed II was having very little success. His Grand Vezir Halil Pasha was already advising him to give up the siege. The sultan rejected this advice, in favour of that offered by the dervish preacher Sheikh Akshemseddin, who was critical of his ruler's inability to have his orders executed properly.²³ The blame fell on the Grand Vezir, who was known to have close ties with the Christians. The sheikh also distrusted the many converts in the Ottoman forces, who to his way of thinking were not good Muslims, ready to die for their faith. His message was that the sultan must conduct the siege more decisively. It seems to have had the desired effect, for it was at this point that Mehmed II demonstrated his strength of purpose. He went ahead with a foolhardy plan to transport a fleet of small ships overland from the Bosphorus to the Golden Horn. Their appearance shook the confidence of the defenders, who now had to strengthen the defences along the Golden Horn. Still more serious was the way the presence of Ottoman ships in the Golden Horn hampered communications with the Genoese in Pera and made the latter less inclined to risk the sultan's wrath by aiding the defenders. They were blamed for warning the Turks about the fire ship attack planned by the defenders on the Turkish fleet in the Golden Horn. This attack, carried out on 28 April, was a failure. It was the first serious setback suffered by the defenders and justified Mehmed II's refusal to raise the siege. But his nerve continued to be tested. His large cannon remained out of action and was not repaired until 6 May, when it started

battering the walls once more. The next day Mehmed II unleashed another assault on the middle section of the land-walls. Once again the defenders threw it back. They seemed to have the measure of the Turks. Benvenuto, the consul of Ancona, who was an eyewitness of events, reckoned that before the final assault the defenders had only lost forty men against the 7,000 killed on the Turkish side. These figures may underestimate the defenders' casualties, but they are not likely to be far wrong.²⁴

This victory encouraged Constantine XI to put out feelers for a negotiated end to the siege. The Byzantine emissary found Mehmed II unwilling to compromise. His only condition for peace was the surrender of the city. The siege turned into a battle of wills, not only between the sultan and the Byzantine emperor, but also between the sultan and his Grand Vezir Halil Pasha, who advised withdrawal. The latter was able to persuade Mehmed II to send a messenger to Constantine XI to reopen negotiations. Again the Byzantine emperor offered a return to the status quo. He reminded the sultan of the benefits his predecessors derived from Constantinople. The implications were that he was willing to become a client of the Ottomans, but not to abandon Constantinople. Such an outcome would have been a triumph for Halil Pasha, but not for Mehmed II, whose reputation was now bound up with the fate of the city. He is supposed to have said, 'Either I take the city or the city takes me dead or alive.'²⁵ The sultan chose to present the emperor's proposal as a sign of weakness, but it was almost a month before he plucked up courage and ordered another assault on the walls of Constantinople. He used the time to weaken the walls still more. There is no doubt that his cannon did an immense amount of damage at key points, but the defenders had learnt how to shore up the defences. In many ways, the rubble where sections of the walls had collapsed was just as serious an obstacle to the assailants as the walls themselves. When an all-out attack was launched on the night of 28 May the defences held surprisingly well. The defenders turned back the first two waves of assault. Nor did the third wave led by the janissaries, who had been kept in reserve, seem to be making much headway, until they found a sally port unguarded, which let them in to the space between the walls. At almost the same moment Giovanni Giustiniani Longo was seriously wounded. He had command of the central section of the walls around the St Romanos Gate, where the fighting was fiercest. There are different accounts about the nature of the wound, but this made little difference to his decision to withdraw from the fray followed by the bulk of his men. This was the turning point, because he had been at the heart of the defence. In vain did the emperor entreat him to remain at his post; in vain did the emperor try to rally the defence – it was too late. He died either fighting to hold the St Romanos

Gate or, according to another version, seeking to escape from the city. The Turks were within the city, which they proceeded to sack. Survivors were rounded up and sold into slavery.

Chance aided the Ottomans, but the longer the siege went on, the disparity of manpower and resources suggested that at some point the defences would give way for whatever reason. There were increasing tensions between Greeks and Latins, which reflected the formers' fears that it would be the latter who reaped the glory for saving the City. They help to explain a notorious incident, which took place on the eve of the final assault. Giovanni Giustiniani Longo called Loukas Notaras a traitor and threatened to run him through with his sword, because the latter refused his request for additional artillery pieces to strengthen the defence around the St Romanos Gate.²⁶ It may have had some bearing on Giustiniani's withdrawal, but this was only decisive because the defenders were stretched to breaking point. There were also tensions within the Ottoman camp centring on the Grand Vezir Halil Pasha, but Mehmed II was able to master these. It may well be that part of his confidence and the army's confidence in him rested on the artillery, which certainly inflicted severe, but not catastrophic damage on the walls of Constantinople. In the end, its effectiveness may have been more psychological than military.²⁷ By itself it was not decisive but it was a factor in persuading not just the sultan but also his commanders to continue the siege.

Like many decisive encounters, the conquest of Constantinople was a 'close run thing'. There is little point in speculating about what might have happened if the siege had been raised. But there is every point in following the immediate consequences, which can hardly be divorced from the event itself. Constantinople was put to the sack, but Mehmed II was quick to restore order. There was much less damage done than in 1204, when the city fell to the soldiers of the fourth crusade, partly because there was much less damage to be done. Mehmed II himself ensured the protection of the fabric of St Sophia, which he converted into a mosque. In doing so he turned it into a symbol of the new dispensation. As he marvelled at the interior of the building, he muttered a couplet of Persian poetry: 'The spider serves as doorkeeper in the palace of Khosroes; the owl sounds the changing of the guard in the fortress of Afrasijab.'²⁸ Images inspired by the downfall of the Sassanians provided a fitting commentary on the passing of a thousand years of Empire.

Perhaps they also express the Conqueror's uncertainty about what to do with Constantinople now that it was his. There is a suggestion that he contemplated leaving the Greeks to manage their own affairs under Ottoman hegemony. There was even talk of Loukas Notaras becoming the first Ottoman governor of the city. Such a plan would have suited Halil Pasha,

who may even have been behind it. It was not to the liking of others in the Conqueror's entourage, who ensured Notaras's execution a day or so after the fall of the city. In an attempt to save himself Notaras apparently implicated Halil Pasha in treasonable correspondence during the siege with the Byzantines.²⁹ Mehmed II dismissed Halil Pasha as Grand Vezir and later had him executed. He raised up in his place his great rival, Zaganos Pasha, who was always the most zealous advocate of an attack on Constantinople. Like so many of those closest to the Conqueror, he was born a Christian. An immediate and very practical consequence of the fall of Constantinople was therefore the elimination of the leaders of the 'old' order, who had worked for accommodation between Byzantine and Ottoman. It was just one way that an era came to an end. It took time for new patterns to emerge, because the fall of Constantinople left a void. Despite its apparent weakness Byzantium was in its last years still an imposing presence, because it remained the hub for a region which reached from the Black Sea coasts to the Aegean and from the Balkans to central Anatolia. In symbolic terms it spread its net still wider from the Russian lands and the Latin West to the Christian communities of Syria, Egypt and eastern Anatolia. How that void was to be filled is intrinsic to any assessment of the significance of the fall of Constantinople. It was to a great extent a matter of emancipation, not so much by jettisoning Byzantium's legacy, as exploiting it, whether by assuming its political mantle in the case of Muscovy, or its guardianship of classical antiquity in the case of Europe, or its imperial destiny in the case of the Ottomans.

II

The fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans is an event which has generated a vast bibliography.³⁰ But since Runciman was writing, there have been only two important general works on the fall of Constantinople. The first was by Agostino Pertusi. His *Caduta di Costantinopoli* in two volumes – a third was added posthumously – is an anthology of contemporary sources bearing on the event together with a translation into Italian.³¹ Pertusi has eschewed a narrative or even thematic approach, on the understanding that the sources should be allowed to speak for themselves. By way of introduction he has provided a series of short historical essays and a detailed day-by-day chronology. Pertusi explains that he became interested in the fall of Constantinople because of its pivotal role in the development of the Western image of the Turk in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, but he fails to explain why he chose to present his findings in the form of an anthology, beyond a nod in the direction of Philipp Anton Déthier's late nineteenth-century project

for the publication in their entirety of all the major sources for the fall of Constantinople. This was a publishing nightmare. Only a single complete copy survives, which is in the National Library of Romania. At the last moment, the editors of *Monumenta Historiae Hungarica*, who had agreed to the publication (in two volumes), thought better of it and refused to continue with the project on the grounds that it failed to meet acceptable scholarly standards, which remains debatable.³² Pertusi appears to share the great Romanian historian Nicola Iorga's opinion that, flawed as it might have been, Déthier's project was still a useful undertaking. There is no suggestion that by adopting the form of an anthology Pertusi was responding to the unease felt by many of his contemporaries – an unease which still persists – about the status, objectivity, and even validity of narrative history. Anthologies became a popular way of sidestepping the dangers of subjectivity inherent in any narrative history. Pertusi was nevertheless well aware that what distinguished his work from the general run of anthologies was its comprehensiveness. Where other compilers were normally content with a selection of the most important texts, he has tried to include all contemporary accounts of the fall of Constantinople with in some cases improved readings of the text. In his third volume he even included previously unedited items. Pertusi divides the texts into those left by eyewitnesses of the siege, which he collects in his first volume, and other contemporary accounts, which form his second volume. He claims to be less interested in reconstructing the event than in recreating the human dimension and in the impact the fall had on the psychological climate of the time,³³ which is the justification for his inclusion of many second-hand accounts. These add little to our knowledge of the course of events, but register reactions – personal and collective – to the news of Constantinople's fall. Pertusi's intentions were admirable. However, his determination not to impose interpretations of his own on the material he collected has meant that we are left in doubt both about the human dimension and about the psychological climate, which he claimed to be illuminating. In the end, Pertusi has left a remarkable study aid, to which all researchers in the field are indebted.

Pertusi limited himself to anthologising contemporary or near-contemporary sources, but Marios Philippides and Walter K. Hanak, who are the joint authors of *The Siege and the Fall of Constantinople in 1453*, spread their net wider and venture as far afield as the nineteenth century.³⁴ They have produced a massive tome, which seeks to rewrite the history of the fall of Constantinople. Too often, in their opinion, other historians have been content to follow in the footsteps of nineteenth-century historians, which has hindered any advance in the study of the fall of Constantinople. A combination of a profound knowledge of the sources with their careful deployment

justifies their claim to have put the subject on 'a more solid foundation', even if in general terms they do very little to alter our understanding of the event. To a surprisingly large extent their achievement lies in the correction of the many mistakes – most minor; a few more serious – made by earlier historians. They provide a searching audit of a century and a half of scholarship. Their main concern is with the documentation of what was believed at different times to have happened rather than with the examination of the general historical context. Their preoccupation with the study of the sources is both strength and weakness. It may cut speculation to a minimum, but this often means that the authors miss – or it may simply be that they are not interested in – the bigger picture. Their book divides into two distinct halves. The first concerns itself with aspects of the historiography of the subject, with particular emphasis on its development among the Greeks whether under Ottoman rule or living in exile in the West. Not surprisingly, the fall of Constantinople remained a living memory for the Greeks, often in the form of legends and traditions, far more than it did with other peoples. The second part of the book deals with military matters and provides a convincing reconstruction of the siege of Constantinople on the basis both of a minute examination of the walls of the city and of the detailed study of the relevant written sources.

Among the valuable contributions which Pertusi, on the one hand, and Philippides and Hanak, on the other, have made is the way they have revealed and analysed the wealth of sources there are for the fall of Constantinople.³⁵ Although my concern will be the implications and the consequences of the event rather than the event itself, my starting point remains an examination of the major sources. The first thing to note is the discrepancy between the abundance of sources relating to the fall of Constantinople and the sparsity of texts which offer solid and accurate information. The reconstruction of the event by modern historians depends heavily on no more than half a dozen texts. These divide between eyewitness accounts left by Westerners and historical narratives compiled by Byzantines. Slav and Ottoman sources scarcely figure. Underpinning all modern accounts is the diary kept by the Venetian ship's surgeon Nicolò Barbaro, which covers the period from 2 March 1451 to 29 May 1453.³⁶ It is easy to understand why modern historians have placed such reliance on this source. It not only provides that sense of immediacy characteristic of diary entries, but it is also filled with precise information about dates and numbers. However, until its publication in 1856 it was virtually unknown. It remained in private ownership until 1837, when the manuscript was deposited in the Marciana Library at Venice. The first scholar to make extensive use of it was A.D. Mordtmann, which has ensured

that a century and half after its publication his *Belagerung und Eroberung Constantinopels* retains much of its freshness.³⁷ Nicolò Barbaro concentrated on the Venetian contribution to the defence of Constantinople and the shortcomings of the Genoese, but he has little to offer on the deeper meaning of the event, beyond recalling the prophesies there were about the fall of the city. Of the other eyewitness accounts perhaps the most important was that of Leonardo of Chios, archbishop of Mitylene, who arrived on 26 October 1452 at Constantinople with the papal legate Cardinal Isidore. His report comes in the form of a letter to Pope Nicholas V, which he wrote on 19 August 1453 after he had reached the safety of Chios.³⁸ Unlike Barbaro's journal it enjoyed a very wide circulation. As part of Cardinal Isidore's entourage he was stationed on the Akropolis of Byzantium, as far away from the land-walls as it was possible to get in Constantinople, but it meant that he had a ringside seat of events in the Golden Horn. Through Cardinal Isidore he had access to the leadership of the defence and was thus able to follow general developments. A Genoese by birth, he was critical of the Venetians and he followed Cardinal Isidore in his suspicions about the sincerity of the Byzantine commitment to the Union of Churches sealed at Florence in 1439. Isidore was not only an eyewitness of the events leading to the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople, but also a leading figure in the defence of the city. After a dramatic escape from the fallen city, Cardinal Isidore despatched a number of letters describing his experiences during the siege, but they add very little to the information contained in Leonardo of Chios's letter to the pope and never had a wide circulation.³⁹ Of the other eyewitness accounts the most helpful for the reconstruction of events is that of Jacopo Tedaldi, a Florentine merchant, who took part in the defence of the city.⁴⁰ He escaped from the sack of the city by swimming out to a Venetian galley, which took him to Negroponte. There he recounted his experiences to a Jean Blanchin, who left a record of them in French. An expanded version was then translated into Latin and was widely diffused as crusade propaganda. It lacks the precise detail which makes Nicolò Barbaro's diary so valuable, but it provides a compelling description of the final Turkish assault. The last eyewitness account comes in the shape of a poem in hexameters entitled *Constantinopolis* by the Brescian humanist Ubertino Puscolo, who was studying at Constantinople in 1453 and lived through the siege. Despite its form it is a surprisingly down to earth piece of work, which provides a clear, concise and accurate narrative.⁴¹

Strangely enough, there is no proper eyewitness account left by a Byzantine. The historian George Sphrantzes lived through the siege and fall of Constantinople and was one of the Emperor Constantine XI's most trusted servants. He takes his account to 4 April 1453, when the Ottoman forces

arrived under the walls of Constantinople, and does not resume his narrative until the moment of the city's fall. He gives no explanation for his failure to provide any narrative of the siege.⁴² The other Byzantine historians of the fall of Constantinople were not present in the city at the time of its fall, but were in a position to obtain information directly from participants in the events. Later historians have therefore quite justifiably set great store by their narratives. Of the Byzantine historians, Doukas may have had the widest range of informants.⁴³ He was in the service of the Gattilusio princes of Mitylene and knew the Ottoman court well. They despatched him in 1455 to the Ottoman capital of Edirne with the tribute they owed the conqueror. While at the Ottoman court Doukas was able to interview members of the Byzantine aristocracy brought in as prisoners of war, but also janissaries, who had spearheaded the final assault on the city. He will also have met survivors of the siege who reached the safety of Mitylene. It seems almost certain that at some point after the conquest he will have had contact – direct or indirect – with Leonardo of Chios, who was then archbishop of Mitylene. Also well informed about the events of 1453 was Michael Kritoboulos. He was a collaborator with the Ottoman regime and was close to Demetrios Palaiologos, brother of the last Byzantine emperor.⁴⁴ The final Byzantine historian of the fall of Constantinople was the Athenian Laonikos Khalkokondyles, who is more problematical. We know very little about him, although he came from a distinguished Athenian family. He was educated at Mistra in the Peloponnese with the philosopher Gemistos Plethon. At some point after 1453 he settled down in Constantinople,⁴⁵ which may explain why he had such good sources of information at the Ottoman court.⁴⁶ This produces a paradoxical situation, where the Byzantine historians are the best guides to events as seen from the Ottoman side.

The Ottoman sources are disappointing. It was only after the death of Mehmed the Conqueror that Turkish historians began to develop a narrative of the conquest of Constantinople. These included Tursun Beg, who presents himself as an eyewitness of events and probably was, despite his lack of engagement with the events he was describing.⁴⁷ What is certain is that he came from an old and distinguished Ottoman family and was close to Mahmud Pasha, Mehmed II's longest serving Grand Vizir.⁴⁸ He must therefore have had excellent sources of information on the siege of Constantinople. His narrative is nevertheless bland and disappointing, and over some important details inaccurate. This can only be partly explained by the fact that he was writing thirty years or so after the events. It was also a reflection of how difficult it was for the Ottomans to come to terms with the conquest of Constantinople, which may have opened up new possibilities but at the cost, as

we shall see, of calling into question old certainties. Reflecting the suspicions there were in the Ottoman camp of the whole undertaking is the letter of the dervish preacher Akshemseddin criticising Mehmed II for his failure to conduct the siege in a manner worthy of Islam. This letter is a unique survival and reveals the divisions which existed within the Ottoman camp.⁴⁹

In much the same way, the Russians paid very little attention to the fall of Constantinople until the turn of the fifteenth century. It was then that an account of the events began to circulate under the name of Nestor, who claimed to have participated in the siege of Constantinople on the Ottoman side.⁵⁰ If at its core there is an eyewitness account it contains few hard facts. On two occasions it purports to give the numbers of defenders killed driving off Ottoman assaults, but they are far too high and represent a very large proportion of the total number of the defenders. They should be compared with the far lower and more realistic figures given by the Anconitan consul Benvenuto.⁵¹ According to Nestor, organising the burial of the fallen was the work of the emperor and the patriarch. The prominence which Nestor's account accords to the patriarch is difficult to explain away. Even more awkward is his insistence on the presence of an empress. There was no patriarch in Constantinople at the time of the siege, still less an empress, as anybody within the walls of the city was likely to know. However, it is the contention of Hanak and Philippides that at some point during the siege Nestor '*somehow* [my italics] escaped from his abductors' and joined the defenders.⁵² In their favour is the way that Nestor related events as though he was taking part in the defence. He provides perhaps the most dramatic account of the final Ottoman assault, as seen from a Byzantine angle. Despite his glaring errors over the presence of a patriarch and an empress, Nestor has reasonably good information about the individual commanders. However, it is difficult to square his presence among the defenders with his statement that having each day 'recorded in writing the actions carried on by the Turks *outside* the city'⁵³ he entered Constantinople, where he had a chance to learn about the deeds of the defenders by questioning 'men worthy of belief and important masters',⁵⁴ for Nestor makes it clear that he entered Constantinople with the victorious Turks and not at any earlier point.⁵⁵ The one incident within Constantinople where he seems to have been present was Mehmed II's triumphal entry into the Great Church. He noted that when the conqueror departed, it was not raining, which, as Philippides and Hanak observe, is a strange observation to make if he was not present.⁵⁶ The garbled quality of much of the narrative suggests two things: that most of it came at second hand and that much of it was recollected a long time after the event. We know nothing for certain about the date of its composition, but there are

grounds for supposing that it made use of a translation into Russian of an Italian account of the fall of Constantinople, which suggests the late fifteenth century at the earliest.⁵⁷ As to the circumstances of its composition it was surely intended for a Russian audience, to whom, as we shall see, its inconsistencies would have made sense. Its value is far more for the light it sheds on the Russian reaction to the fall of Constantinople than for any hard information it contains.

Constantinople meant just as much to the Orthodox peoples of the Balkans as it did to the Russians.⁵⁸ As recently as 1448 George Branković, the despot of Serbia, contributed funds for the repair of the walls of Constantinople. However, the fall of Constantinople elicited very little by way of response from the peoples of the Balkans. George Branković found himself in a false position. As a vassal of the Ottoman ruler he had to send a contingent, which joined the Ottoman forces under the walls of Constantinople. It included Konstantin Mikhailovič, who left a short account of the siege. He was at pains to emphasise that the Serbs were in the Ottoman camp under false pretences. The sultan had led them to believe that they would be deployed against the emir of Karaman, not against the Byzantine emperor.⁵⁹ The Serbs were stationed in front of the Kharisios Gate and therefore well positioned to know what was happening at the St Romanos Gate, where the Ottomans made their final breakthrough. Though uncorroborated, Mikhailovič's information that the Byzantine emperor was unable to deploy his strategic reserve to stem the Ottoman onslaught has the ring of truth. It meant that he was left to fight alone, which he did until he was overpowered and decapitated. His account of the emperor's death tallies with those of other trustworthy witnesses. He was even able to name the janissary responsible for the emperor's death, though the naming of names is by itself never proof of authenticity.

Whatever the interest of the Turkish and Slav narratives the fact remains that the eyewitness accounts of real value are all Western in origin. They have provided the basic material for modern reconstructions of the event, which are therefore imbued with a Western perspective. But there is more to the study of Constantinople's fall than its reconstruction. It generated a vast amount of contemporary and near-contemporary commentary, which sought to understand its significance. We are dealing with what Agostino Pertusi dubbed *'l'Eco nel Mondo'*, which reflected the concern felt not only in Latin Christendom but also in the Orthodox world and Islam, and wherever the mystique of the 'Queen of Cities' cast its spell. At its most basic, it came in the form of lamentations for its passing. These extended beyond the Orthodox world, where they would have been a natural emotional reaction. There were also Western⁶⁰ and Armenian laments⁶¹ and a lament in Hebrew too.⁶² The fall of

Constantinople even elicited sympathy from a chronicler at the Timurid Court of Herat.⁶³ It also produced more considered appraisals, which concentrated on its implications. It was a way of evaluating its significance; and it will be this, rather than the reconstruction of the event, which will be my main concern.

The exact degree of interest in the fall of Constantinople varied both over time and from society to society. It was fuelled by the relevance which this event had in different places and at different times. Not surprisingly, it was felt most intensely by the Greeks, who had to confront the question of who they were now that Constantinople was gone. It was this question that lies at the heart of the Byzantine accounts of the fall of Constantinople, which we have already discussed as among the most important contemporary treatments of the event. It was still an object of deep concern to Greeks into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁶⁴ In the West it mattered for a comparatively short period of time, for perhaps less than twenty years immediately after 1453, but during this time it was among the most pressing concerns of the day. This was reflected in the mass of material it generated. Leonardo of Chios's report quickly became the authoritative source on the fall of Constantinople and provided the material for a number of secondary accounts. It even enjoyed an afterlife in the sense that it was translated into Greek in the sixteenth century and became the basis for later Greek accounts of the event.⁶⁵ Just as important were the writings of Enea Silvio Piccolomini, the future Pope Pius II, who did more than anybody to shape opinion in the West about the fall of Constantinople. Unlike Leonardo he was not an eyewitness. He first heard the news while on a papal mission to the Habsburg court. It came second or third hand via Serbia. He immediately despatched a series of highly emotional letters to Pope Nicholas V and others.⁶⁶ His theme was the blow to civilisation represented by the fall of Constantinople. It was a message that he reiterated in his historical works, such as the *Cosmographia*, which had a very wide circulation. Piccolomini was at the centre of a debate about how to confront the situation created by the fall of Constantinople. He championed and organised a crusade for the recovery of the city. His death in 1464 meant that his crusade was stillborn. Thereafter interest in Byzantium waned and attention turned increasingly to the question of the Turks. But Piccolomini's stance was vindicated to the extent that his advocacy of Constantinople deepened awareness in the West of the notion of Europe as a civilisation confronting barbarism represented by the Turks. In contrast to the West, the fall of Constantinople initially left the Russians indifferent. Only when its relevance to their own situation became apparent towards the end of the fifteenth century did they pay attention. It was then that the relevant chapter of Enea Silvio Piccolomini's *Cosmographia* was translated into

Russian and Nestor's account of the fall of Constantinople incorporated into the Russian chronicle tradition.⁶⁷ Far more surprising is the apparent lack of interest in the fall of Constantinople evinced by Ottoman historians. Their hesitations reflected disquiet occasioned by Mehmed the Conqueror's style of government. Many connected its arbitrary character with his conquest of Constantinople. It was only after the Conqueror's death in 1481 that Ottoman historians felt free to write about the fall of Constantinople. Historians such as Ashikpashazade and Neshri welcomed the conquest, but were suspicious of the way it allowed Mehmed II to alter the whole character of Ottoman government. They helped to create a climate of opinion which inhibited Tursun Beg from whole-hearted celebration of the conqueror's triumph as the essential step in the creation of an Ottoman Empire. We catch the echoes of a debate over the future of the Ottoman enterprise.

III

Does the historical importance of the fall of Constantinople therefore mainly lie in the process of coming to terms with its implications and the possibilities it opened up? I shall take my cue from Runciman, who dismissed traditional ideas about its historical importance. It did not mark, in his judgement, the end of the Middle Ages; nor can it be held responsible either for Atlantic exploration or the Italian Renaissance. These are all best understood as secular processes, in which a single event serves at best as a marker. Does this mean that for Runciman the fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans was not a historical turning point? Not at all, but it was at a deeper level than historical analysis was capable of plumbing. He presents 1453 as a tragedy, with 'the Greek people as the tragic hero'.⁶⁸ This has given his book an emotional charge, which allied to great literary skill propels it into the realm of literature rather than history. The true meaning of the fall of Constantinople was in Runciman's opinion that it 'marks the end of an old story, the story of Byzantine civilization'.⁶⁹ With that I am in complete agreement and it will be the central theme of this book. However, the destruction of a civilisation hardly looks at first sight like a turning point in history, but a moment's thought reveals that endings are often new beginnings. The fall of Constantinople, for example, was to provide the occasion and the setting for the elaboration of another civilisation, that of the Ottomans. That said, the notion of turning points in history is a contentious issue, which needs to be addressed. It raises the whole question of historical change. It is now usual to accept that historical change is a continuous and largely subterranean process, which is unaffected by events, however spectacular. It has become fashionable to

dismiss events as no more than the foam thrown up by the tides of history. There is a good case for arguing that this applies to the fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans: it had been so long in the offing that when it happened very little changed. But this is to assume that turning points in history are indistinguishable from change, whereas they are rather different things: change works imperceptibly and elusively, while turning points stand out and alert historians to the process of long-term change, which is otherwise almost impossible to chart. The fall of Constantinople acted in exactly this way. It was a cataclysmic event which forced contemporaries to confront the problem of historical change and at the same time to fashion new identities and institutions appropriate to changed times. It sparked debate about the fate of the world and created new agendas for a new world order. It provides an excellent example of how historians use events, as a historiographical tool, with which to confront the problem of change.

Given the weakness of Byzantium, its conquest by the Ottomans was no surprise. Yet it sent shock waves around the world. It was largely a matter of emotional impact generated by what Constantinople still stood for. Even in its declining years it remained of the greatest symbolic importance. It was both the New Rome and the New Jerusalem. Its conquest had been the goal of the early caliphs. To the end it remained pivotal to the medieval order. Its overthrow and with it the destruction of Byzantine civilisation were not only shocking but also forced a reassessment of the state of the world. We are dealing with a process of coming to terms with a changing world. It happened very quickly in the West but took longer elsewhere, but even in Russia and in the Ottoman Empire significant debate was over soon after 1500. This does not mean that the fall of Constantinople was not a recurrent cause of interest and concern, especially among the Greeks. However, I do not think it worthwhile to pursue later manifestations, because it makes the subject too unwieldy. I do not want to find myself drawn into considering the revival of interest in the fall of Constantinople among the expatriates and Greeks of nineteenth-century Constantinople, which might have had the appearance of academic enthusiasm but also had a strong political dimension, whether in the shape of the *Megale Idea* of the Greeks⁷⁰ or of the Eastern Question of the European powers.⁷¹ I prefer to concentrate on the way that in its immediate aftermath Latins, Greeks, Ottomans and Russians reached a measure of understanding of the meaning of the fall of Constantinople, in so far as it affected their own destinies.

My overarching theme will be the dissolution of Byzantine civilisation and the social and political structures which supported it, and the immediate impact this had not only on the Greek community but also on Europe – a

term given a clearer meaning by the fall of Constantinople – and on Russia and the Ottoman Empire. Civilisation has a bewildering number of different meanings.⁷² I shall limit it to the artistic, ceremonial, literary, and intellectual and religious expressions of a dominant politico-religious system. At Byzantium this was built around the imperial office. The ideology of empire insisted that imperial authority received divine sanction, so that it could further God's purposes, which in practice meant the protection of the Christian faith. This presupposed a harmonious relationship with the Church, which was not always the case. The success of Byzantine civilisation over the centuries lay in the ability of its exponents to give these notions validity. This was only possible because they were grounded in the bricks and mortar of Constantinople, which even in its final days retained enough of its former glory to sustain dreams of empire. While it stood so did the Byzantine Empire.⁷³ Though his power at the end was largely illusory, the Byzantine emperor still enjoyed considerable prestige. This was a reflection of the continuing success of Byzantine diplomats, churchmen, artists and scholars in purveying the message of Byzantine civilisation.

This book will divide into two very unequal halves. The first will deal with the state of Byzantium during the half century before its final overthrow; the second – and much longer – will consider the impact of the fall of Constantinople not only on the Greeks but on a much wider world. I will argue that it had a significant part to play in the reconfiguration of Europe, Muscovy and the Ottoman Empire, so much so that it acted as a turning point in history. However, this was only possible because of the way the Byzantines had in their last few years preserved and strengthened the essentials of Byzantine civilisation at a time when its political power was dwindling away. Its destruction worked to the advantage of others, who availed themselves of different aspects of the Byzantine legacy. I close with a consideration of what was lost, which puts into relief what others gained.

Notes

- 1 S. Runciman, *The Fall of Constantinople 1453* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), xiii.
- 2 E. Pears, *The Destruction of the Greek Empire and the Story of the Capture of Constantinople by the Turks* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1903).
- 3 M. Philippides and W.K. Hanak, *The Siege and the Fall of Constantinople in 1453: Historiography, Topography, and Military Studies* (Farnham and Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2011).

- 4 F. Babinger, 'Von Amurath zu Amurath', *Oriens*, 3 (1950), 229–65; F. Babinger, *Mehmed the Conqueror and his Time* [Bollingen Series 96] (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 56–63; H. Inalcik, 'Byzantium and the origins of the crisis of 1444', *Actes du XIIe Congrès international des Études Byzantines*, II, 159–63.
- 5 C. Imber, *The Crusade of Varna, 1443–1445* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 71–8.
- 6 G. Sphrantzes, *Giorgio Sfranze, Cronaca*, ed. R. Maisano [CFHB, ser. ital., 29] (Rome: Accademia nazionale dei Lincei, 1990), xxiii, 10: 84.15–24; transl. M. Philippides, *The Fall of the Byzantine Empire: A Chronicle by George Sphrantzes 1401–1477* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), 51.
- 7 Sphrantzes, ed. Maisano, xxix, 1–5: 100–2; transl. Philippides, 57.
- 8 See D.M. Nicol, *The Immortal Emperor: the Life and Legend of Constantine Palaiologos, the Last Emperor of the Romans* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
- 9 M.-H. Blanchet, *Georges-Gennadios Scholarios (vers 1400–vers 1472)* [Archives de l'Orient Chrétien, 20] (Paris: Institut français d'études byzantines, 2008), 419–37.
- 10 Ubertino Puscolo, *Constantinopolis*, II. 232–49, in A.S. Ellissen, *Analekten der mittel- und neugriechischen Literatur* (Leipzig: privately published, 1857), III, Anhang, 31.
- 11 I. Djurić, *Le crépuscule de Byzance* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1996), 135, 201–2; M. Kordoses, 'The question of Constantine Palaiologos' coronation', in R. Beaton and Ch. Roueché (eds), *The Making of Byzantine History. Studies dedicated to Donald M. Nicol* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1993), 137–41.
- 12 Sphrantzes, ed. Maisano, xxxi, 11: 112.22–7; transl. Philippides, 61–2.
- 13 Sphrantzes, ed. Maisano, xxxii, 7: 116.19–26; transl. Philippides, 63.
- 14 K.-P. Matschke, 'Tore, Torwächter und Torzöllner von Konstantinopel in spätbyzantinischer Zeit', *Jahrbuch für Regionalgeschichte*, 16 (1989), 42–57.
- 15 W.K. Hanak, 'Pope Nicholas V and the aborted crusade of 1452–1453 to rescue Constantinople from the Turks', *Byzantinoslavica*, 65 (2007), 337–59.
- 16 Doukas, *Michaelis Ducae nepotis, Historia Byzantina*, ed. C. Becker [CSHB] (Bonn: Weber, 1834), XXXVI, 5, 255–7; Doukas, *Decline and Fall of Byzantium to the Ottoman Turks by Doukas*, transl. H.J. Magoulias (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1975), 205.
- 17 Babinger, *Mehmed the Conqueror*, 66–70.
- 18 Doukas, ed. Becker, XXXIII, 11: 231.16–18; transl. Magoulias, 191.
- 19 Doukas, ed. Becker, XXXIV, 2: 235–6; transl. Magoulias, 192–3.
- 20 Babinger, *Mehmed the Conqueror*, 75–9.
- 21 Sphrantzes, ed. Maisano, xxxv, 6–8: 132.8–24; transl. Philippides, 69.
- 22 M. Philippides, 'Giovanni Longo Giustiniani, the Genoese condottiere of Constantinople in 1453', *Byzantine Studies/Études Byzantines*, n.s. 3 (1998), 13–53.

- 23 Babinger, *Mehmed the Conqueror*, 88.
- 24 A. Pertusi, *Testi inediti e poco noti sulla caduta di Costantinopoli* [Mondo Medievale: sezione di storia bizantina e slava, 4] (Bologna: Pàtron, 1983), 4–5.
- 25 Doukas, ed. Becker, XXXVIII, 18: 276.15–16; transl. Magoulias, 218.
- 26 J.-P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, 159, c.936; Pertusi, *Testi inediti*, I, 152.324–9.
- 27 K. DeVries, 'Gunpowder weapons at the siege of Constantinople, 1453', in V. Lev (ed.), *War and Society in the Eastern Mediterranean, 7th–15th Centuries* [Medieval Mediterranean, 9] (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 343–62.
- 28 Tursun Beg, *The History of Mehmed the Conqueror*, ed. H. Inalcik and R. Murphey (Minneapolis and Chicago: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1978), 51a.7–8; Tursun Bey, *La conquista di Costantinopoli*, transl. L. Berardi [Islamica, 2] (Milan: Mondadori, 2007), 82; Pertusi, *La caduta di Costantinopoli*, I, 330.726–7.
- 29 Cf. Philippides and Hanak, *Siege and Fall*, 596–617.
- 30 See *ibid.* 663–713.
- 31 A. Pertusi, *La caduta di Costantinopoli*, I: *Le testimonianze dei contemporanei*; II: *L'eco nel mondo* (Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori, 1976); Pertusi, *Testi inediti*.
- 32 See E. Pears, *Forty Years in Constantinople: The Recollections of Sir Edwin Pears, 1873–1915* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1916), 138–40.
- 33 Pertusi, *La caduta di Costantinopoli*, I, xlix–xl.
- 34 Philippides and Hanak, *Siege and Fall*.
- 35 See Pertusi, *La caduta di Costantinopoli*, II, 497–512 for a list of sources. In addition to the 47 texts that he translates and annotates he notes the existence of another 165 works relevant to the fall of Constantinople by contemporaries and near contemporaries.
- 36 Nicolò Barbaro, *Giornale dell'assedio di Costantinopoli 1453*, ed. E. Cornet (Vienna: Libreria Tendler & Comp., 1856); *id.*, *Diary of the Siege of Constantinople, 1453*, transl. J.R. Jones (New York: Exposition Press, 1969); Pertusi, *La caduta di Costantinopoli*, I, 5–51; Philippides and Hanak, *Siege and Fall*, 10–13.
- 37 A.D. Mordtmann, *Belagerung und Eroberung Constantinopels durch die Türken im Jahre 1453 nach den Originalquellen bearbeitet* (Stuttgart and Augsburg: J.G. Cotta'scher Verlag, 1858).
- 38 J.-P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, 159, cc.923–41; Pertusi, *La caduta di Costantinopoli*, I, 112–71; J.R. Melville Jones, *The Siege of Constantinople 1453: Seven Contemporary Accounts* (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1972), 11–41. See M. Philippides, 'The Fall of Constantinople 1453: Bishop Leonardo Giustiniani and his Italian followers', *Viator*, 29 (1998), 189–225; Philippides and Hanak, *Siege and Fall*, 14–19.
- 39 Pertusi, *La caduta di Costantinopoli*, I, 52–111. See M. Philippides, 'The Fall of Constantinople 1453: classical comparisons and the circle of Cardinal Isidore', *Viator*, 38 (2007), 349–83; Philippides and Hanak, *Siege and Fall*, 26–31.

- 40 Pertusi, *La caduta di Costantinopoli*, I, 172–89; Melville Jones, *Siege*, 1–10; M. Philippides, *Mehmed II the Conqueror and the Fall of Franco-Byzantine Levant to the Ottoman Turks: Some Western Views and Testimonies* [Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 302] (Tempe, Ariz.: ACMRS, 2007), 133–217, 341–46; Philippides and Hanak, *Siege and Fall*, 107–11.
- 41 A. Ellissen, *Analekten der mittel- und neugriechischen Literatur* (Leipzig: privately printed, 1855–60), III, Anhang, 12–83; Pertusi, *La caduta di Costantinopoli*, I, 198–213; Philippides and Hanak, *Siege and Fall*, 31–2.
- 42 Contra M. Carroll, ‘Notes on the authorship of the “Siege” section of the *Chronicon Maius* of Pseudo-Sphrantzes, Book III’, *Byzantion*, 41 (1971), 28–44; 42 (1972), 5–22; 43 (1973), 30–8, it is now absolutely clear that the ‘Siege’ section of the Pseudo-Sphrantzes has nothing to do with the historian George Sphrantzes. See now Philippides and Hanak, *Siege and Fall*, 139–91.
- 43 Sofia Kotzabassi, ‘Ist der Kopist des Geschichtswerkes von Dukas Dukas selbst?’, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 96 (2003), 679–83.
- 44 D.R. Reinsch, ‘Kritoboulos of Imbros: learned historian, Ottoman raya and Byzantine patriot’, *Zbornik Radova Vizantološkog Instituta*, 40 (2003), 297–311.
- 45 H. Wurm and E. Gamillscheg, ‘Bemerkungen zu Laonikos Chalkokondyles’, *Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik*, 42 (1992), 213–19.
- 46 Sp. Vryonis, Jr., *Byzantium, Seljuqs and Ottomans* [Byzantina kai Metbyzantina, 2] (Malibu: Undena, 1981), no. XII; M. Cazacu, ‘Les parentés byzantines et ottomanes de l’historien Laonikos Chalkokondyle (c.1423–c.1470)’, *Turcica*, 16 (1984), 95–114.
- 47 H. Inalcik, ‘Tursun Beg, historian of Mehmed the Conqueror’s time’, *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*, 69 (1977), 57–71; N. Vatin, ‘Tursun Beg assista-t-il au siege de Constantinople en 1453?’, *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*, 91 (2001), 317–29.
- 48 T. Stavrides, *The Sultan of Vezirs: The Life and Times of the Ottoman Grand Vezir Mahmud Pasha Angelović (1453–1474)* [The Ottoman Empire and its Heritage, 24] (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 297–8.
- 49 H. Inalcik, *Fatih Devri üzerinde tetkiler ve vesikalar* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1954), 127–9, 217–19; Pertusi, *La caduta di Costantinopoli*, I, 299–303; H.J. Kissling, ‘Aq Şems ed-Din. Ein türkischer Heiliger aus der Endzeit von Byzanz’, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 44 (1951), 323–33.
- 50 Nestor-Iskander, *The Tale of Constantinople (Of its Origin and Capture by the Turks in the Year 1453)* (From the early sixteenth-century manuscript of the Troitse-Sergieva Lavra, No. 773), annotated transl. by W.K. Hanak and M. Philippides [Late Byzantine and Ottoman Studies, 5] (New Rochelle, NY: Caratzas, 1998); W.K. Hanak, ‘Some historiographical observations on the sources of Nestor-Iskander’s *The Tale of Constantinople*’, in R. Beaton and C. Roueché (eds), *The Making of Byzantine History: Studies Dedicated to Donald M. Nicol* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1993), 35–45; Philippides and Hanak, *Siege and Fall*, 112–37.

- 51 Pertusi, *La caduta di Costantinopoli*, 4–5. Up to but not including the final assault the consul reckoned that the defenders had lost forty men against 7,000 on the Ottoman side.
- 52 Nestor, 1–7; Philippides and Hanak, *Siege and Fall*, 114.
- 53 Nestor, §89, 96.25–6. Cf. Pertusi, *La caduta di Costantinopoli*, I, 298: ‘ho scritto ogni giorno le azioni compiute dai turchi *fuori* dalla città.’
- 54 Nestor, §89, 96.28. Nestor’s choice of the word ‘master’ is odd. He uses it on occasion, when listing the ‘great and the good’ of Constantinople, but always after court dignitaries and other nobles, which suggests that by it he intended civic leaders.
- 55 Cf. Pertusi, *La caduta di Costantinopoli*, I, 298: ‘siamo entrati nella città *contemporaneamente* ai turchi.’
- 56 Philippides and Hanak, *Siege and Fall*, 137.
- 57 B. Unbegaun, ‘Les relations vieux-russes de la prise de Constantinople’, *Revue des études slaves*, 9 (1929), 31–5.
- 58 J. Dujčev, *Medioevo bizantino-slavo* (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1971), 478–86.
- 59 *Memoiren eines janitscharen oder türkische Chronik*: [Slavische Geschichtschreiber, 8] (Graz: Verlag Styria, 1975); Pertusi, *La caduta di Costantinopoli*, I, 256–60.
- 60 Pertusi, *La caduta di Costantinopoli*, II, 293–341.
- 61 A.A. Sanjian, ‘Two contemporary Armenian elegies on the fall of Constantinople, 1453’, *Viator*, 1 (1970), 223–61; Pertusi, *La caduta di Costantinopoli*, II, 410–19.
- 62 A. Sharon, ‘A Hebrew lament from Venetian Crete on the fall of Constantinople’, *Dialogos*, 7 (2000), 43–6.
- 63 V.F. Piacentini, ‘Repubbliche marinare e Ottomani nella percezione di alcune corti d’Oriente della seconda metà del secolo XV’, in *L’Europa dopo la caduta di Costantinopoli* (Spoleto: Fondazione di studi sull’alto Medioevo, 2008), 145–7.
- 64 Philippides and Hanak, *Siege and Fall*, 46–65; P. Schreiner, ‘Die Epoche Mehmeds des Eroberers in zeitgenössischen Quellen aus dem Patriarchat’, in N. Asutay-Effenberger and U. Rehm (eds), *Sultan Mehmet II. Eroberer Konstantinopels – Patron der Künste* (Cologne, Weimar and Vienna: Böhlau, 2009), 31–40.
- 65 Philippides and Hanak, *Siege and Fall*, 139–91.
- 66 Pertusi, *La caduta di Costantinopoli*, II, 40–71.
- 67 Unbegaun, ‘Les relations vieux-russes’, 31–4.
- 68 Runciman, *Fall of Constantinople*, xi–xiii.
- 69 Ibid. 189.
- 70 The *Megale Idea*, which dominated Greek political life from the late nineteenth century, revolved around aspirations of re-creating the Byzantine Empire under the auspices of the Kingdom of Greece.

- 71 For a fascinating insight into these ramifications, see E. Goldstein, 'Holy wisdom and British foreign policy, 1918–1922: the St Sophia redemption agitation', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 15 (1991), 36–64. I thank the editor of the series – Professor K.G. Robbins – for drawing my attention to this article.
- 72 Cf. B. Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 138–83 for a different view of what constitutes civilization.
- 73 P.J. Alexander, 'The strength of empire and capital as seen through Byzantine eyes', *Speculum*, 37 (1962), 339–57.

CHAPTER 2

Byzantium on the eve¹

I

The year 1402 marks a watershed in the history of the late Byzantine Empire. In that year the Mongol conqueror Tamerlane defeated and captured the Ottoman sultan Bayezid I at the battle of Ankara. It gave Byzantium half a century's respite, which made all the difference between it ending not with a whimper but a bang, for that half century saw it recover some of its prestige and prosperity. On the eve of the battle of Ankara the Byzantine Empire was all but done for and counted for very little. So taken for granted had the fall of Constantinople become that had it occurred at this juncture it would have caused scarcely a ripple on the surface of the historical record. But the worst did not come to the worst, thanks to Tamerlane's victory. There followed what Ottoman chroniclers remembered as a time of troubles (*Fetret Devri*), when a series of civil wars among Bayezid's sons convulsed the Ottoman territories in the Balkans and Anatolia.² Byzantium was the major beneficiary, so much so that the Venetians began to worry about the dangers that a restored Byzantine Empire might hold for their commercial interests. By a treaty of 1403 Bayezid's eldest son Süleiman waived the tribute which the Byzantine emperor had for the past thirty years paid to the Ottoman ruler as a mark of client status. Instead, following an almost-forgotten Byzantine convention Süleiman recognised the emperor's seniority by pledging him filial devotion. In addition, he surrendered to the latter control not only of Thessaloniki and its hinterland, including Mount Athos, but also of the Black Sea coasts as far as the port of Mesembria (modern Nesebâr).³ So, quite unexpectedly, Byzantium was given a breathing space. If it only delayed the Ottoman conquest, it also gave Byzantium the opportunity for one last *Renovatio*, which helped to change the significance of the final fall of Constantinople, for by 1453 Byzantium was a far more influential force

than it had been in 1402. Its neighbours held it in much higher regard. Constantinople was more prosperous and populous and its citizens had recovered much of their self-confidence, which helps to explain their stout defence of their city. It was an impressive transformation, which owed much to the Emperor Manuel II Palaiologos (1391–1425).⁴

Manuel was already 52, and visiting the French court, when he received news of Constantinople's deliverance. He had known setbacks and humiliations. He must have thought that he would die in exile in Western Europe. But once the opportunity came he set about restoring Byzantium with a wisdom derived from adversity. The weapons he possessed were the pivotal position of Constantinople and the lingering prestige that still attached to the imperial office. In the aftermath of the battle of Ankara Bayezid's sons were willing to look on him as an honest broker. The main beneficiary was at first the eldest son Süleiman, who with Byzantine support secured control of Rumeli, as the Ottoman territories in the Balkans were known. After his death in 1411 Manuel worked with Mehmed I, another of Bayezid's sons. The emperor's reward was confirmation of the 1403 treaty, which was the essential safeguard of Byzantium's position. Manuel's position was secure enough for him to leave Constantinople on tours of inspection of the territories that still remained to the Byzantine Empire. In 1408 he went to the Peloponnese and to Thessaloniki, where he respectively installed his young sons Theodore and Andronikos as despots. Then in 1414 he set out on a longer tour. His main concern was the Peloponnese, which was far and away the most important of his possessions. He rebuilt the wall known as the Hexamilion across the Isthmus of Corinth with a view to improving its defences. He also crushed a local rebellion, which at least temporarily strengthened imperial control over the local *archontes*, who were the real power in the Peloponnese.

Manuel returned to Constantinople in March 1416. The strength of his position was reflected in his refusal to surrender the Ottoman pretender Düzme Mustafa to Mehmed I and the latter's agreement that Manuel should act as his jailer. Manuel was by now an old man and increasingly handed over the reins of power to his son John VIII,⁵ who was crowned co-emperor in 1421, the same year that Mehmed I died. It was perhaps unwise of Manuel to give in to pressure from his son to release Düzme Mustafa with the aim of fomenting a war of succession directed against Mehmed's heir, Murad II; for the latter responded by laying siege to Constantinople in 1422. This turned out to be little more than a demonstration, in that Murad made no attempt to press the siege after the failure of the first assault. But the next year his armies destroyed the Hexamilion and started to blockade Thessaloniki. Under pressure from its citizens to surrender the city to the Turks, its despot Andronikos

Palaiologos preferred to cede it to the Venetians. This Murad II treated as a hostile act and in 1430 stormed the city.⁶

The loss of Thessaloniki turned out to be the beginning of the bitter end. It was an assertion by Murad II that any state within the Ottoman sphere of influence which made political arrangements without the consent of the Ottoman ruler was liable to be punished. Murad II did not, however, follow up the conquest of Thessaloniki by once again laying siege to Constantinople. The conquest of Constantinople was no longer on his agenda, not so much because of his failure in 1422, more because its continuing independence suited the Ottomans rather well. In many ways Constantinople remained the hub around which Ottoman political and commercial life revolved. It was advisable to remain on good terms with the Byzantine emperor, who was in a position to upset the precarious understanding with a variety of local powers – Muslim and Christian – upon which the authority of the Ottoman ruler still depended. For the time being he needed good relations with Constantinople. For one thing they assured him of the tacit support of the Orthodox Church, which allowed him the more easily to control his Christian subjects. For another they facilitated access to Venetian and Genoese merchants, mostly working out of Constantinople and neighbouring Pera, who provided vital supplies and services. A key fact was Venetian and Genoese domination of the commercial framework, in which the Ottomans operated.⁷ The Italians also had control of the seas, which left the Ottomans vulnerable. Any maritime ambitions the latter might have had were stifled for the time being by the defeat their fleet suffered off Gallipoli on 29 May 1416 at the hands of the Venetians.⁸

Though somewhat fortuitous, the Venetian victory emphasised that in an emergency Byzantium had access to Italian sea power, but it went further than this. The Byzantine imperial house was connected by marriage to a number of Italian princely houses.⁹ The importance of this is apparent from the lengths Manuel II went to obtain papal approval of marriages he had arranged for his sons to Italian princesses. Marriage, as ever, remained a political tool. The marriages contracted by Manuel II's children are a rough guide to the way the emperor was trying to restore Byzantine prestige. His eldest son and successor John VIII married three times. His first wife was a Russian princess, his second came from the Montferrat family of northern Italy, and his last wife was a daughter of the Grand Komnenos of Trebizond. His choice of wife reflects how wide the political horizons of Byzantium still were: from Russia and the Black Sea to Italy. The importance of the Italian connection is underlined by the marriage of John VIII's brother Theodore into the powerful Malatesta family of Rimini. Apart from the useful ties forged with mainland

Italy, these marriages positioned the Palaiologan dynasty at the head of those petty Italian princes, who remained a force in Greece and the Aegean. The Palaiologoi were connected by marriage to the Tocco, Zaccaria, Acciajuoli and Gattilusio families, to which one might also add the royal house of Lusignan of Cyprus. These marriages put the Palaiologoi at the centre of that Levantine world that had grown up after 1204 on the ruins of the Byzantine Empire. Furthermore, relations between Constantinople and Trebizond were possibly closer in this final phase of Byzantine history than they had ever been. They were united by a common interest in Black Sea trade, while the brightest young men at the Trapezuntine court went to Constantinople to finish their education and often stayed on.

In one respect Constantinople and Trebizond differed after 1402. The Grand Komnenoi married into the neighbouring Turkish dynasties on a regular basis, so much so that the Empire of Trebizond can be described as a 'Christian emirate'. There was a time when it seemed that this would also become the practice in Byzantium. Notoriously, the Emperor John VI Kantakouzenos (1347–54) gave his daughter Theodora in marriage to a son of the Ottoman emir Orhan.¹⁰ But marriage ties to the Ottoman dynasty were not to form part of Manuel II's diplomacy, for it would have been an admission of client status. This was a lesson taught by the marriages of Serbian princesses first to Bayezid I and then Murad II. Manuel II knew from personal experience the humiliations of client status. Just before he ascended the throne in 1391 he had to obey a summons from Bayezid to join the Ottoman forces, which were gathering to end the independence of the last Byzantine outpost in Anatolia, the city of Philadelphia. After 1402 a cornerstone of Byzantine policy was to avoid being reduced once again to client status. It was a measure of Manuel II's success in restoring Byzantium's prestige that Ottoman rulers preferred to use the language of friendship in their dealings with the Byzantine emperor. It was a recognition that they were, if not quite equals, then near equals.

The outward respect accorded to the emperors of Constantinople by the Ottomans after 1402 is a measure of Manuel II's success. It depended to an extent on the threat of Western intervention, if there was any move against Constantinople. The historian George Sphrantzes claimed to have been present when the emperor explained to his son John VIII Palaiologos how to manage the Ottomans: the emperor advised playing the Western card as a way of intimidating the Ottomans, but on no account should the price of Latin aid be consent to a Union of Churches with Rome, because this would produce deep divisions at home, which were likely to prove fatal.¹¹ This was wise counsel which revealed the Emperor Manuel's acute awareness of Byzantium's major source of strength: its ability to hold and profit by the balance of power.

Thanks to his long stay in the West the emperor had a sharp appreciation of its political realities. He registered the effect of the Great Schism and believed that no real help could be expected from the West until it was resolved. He was excited by the prospect of the council which gathered at Constance towards the end of 1414 with the purpose of ending the Great Schism, which had divided the Latin Church for nearly forty years. He made sure that Byzantine emissaries were present, so that they could raise the possibility of ending that other schism between Constantinople and Rome. If it did not come very high on the agenda of the new pope Martin IV (1417–31), these overtures eventually led after Manuel's death to further negotiations, which produced the council of Ferrara Florence.

Manuel II's diplomacy was complemented in his later years by the work of the Patriarch Joseph II (1416–39). He was an ideal choice as patriarch. A scion of the imperial house of Bulgaria with Slavonic as his first language, he was deeply conscious of his responsibilities to the Orthodox of the Balkans and of the Russian lands. Together with the then archbishop of all Russia, Photios (1408–31), he did much to strengthen the Russian Church's ties with Constantinople by challenging the creation of an independent Orthodox Church in Lithuania. The strength of the patriarch's position was revealed after Photios's death in 1431, when Joseph was able to insist on the appointment of another Greek as archbishop of all Russia, despite the tacit agreement that Greeks and Russians should alternate as holders of this office. However, this appointment was to lead to deteriorating relations between Russia and Constantinople, because the new archbishop Isidore went on to play an important role at the council of Ferrara Florence. The Russians saw his subsequent conversion to Rome and his elevation to the College of Cardinals as a betrayal of Orthodoxy.¹²

Whether the Union of Churches proclaimed at Florence in 1439 weakened the fabric of the Byzantine polity or not is a question to which we shall return. It went counter to the advice supposedly given by Manuel II Palaiologos to his son John. The historian George Sphrantzes claimed that John had been reluctant to accept his father's advice and had walked out of the room. Sphrantzes was left alone with the old emperor, who confided to him that what the Empire needed was a manager rather than an emperor, but this was something that his son John refused to understand, because he was under the spell of old dreams of imperial glory.¹³ There may have been an element of this behind John VIII's later decision to participate in a Union Council, but it should also be appreciated that the Ottoman conquest of Thessaloniki in 1430 left him in an uncomfortable position. It had unsettled the balance of power, on which Byzantium's position depended. Serious

negotiations with the papacy were a way of bringing pressure to bear on the Ottomans, which they did. They infuriated the Ottoman ruler Murad II, who saw it as pure ingratitude: didn't the Byzantines understand, he was supposed to have said to his vezirs, that friendship with him counted for more than an alliance with the Latins?¹⁴ But there was little that he could do about it. In the short term, John VIII's strategy was successful, perhaps too much so. It magnified underlying divisions at the Ottoman court, which in 1444 forced Murad II to abdicate in favour of his twelve-year-old son Mehmed II, who proved incapable of mastering the situation. In 1446 the Grand Vezir Çandarlı Halil Pasha engineered Mehmed's dismissal and the return of Murad II. The depth of this political crisis revealed some of the fundamental weaknesses of the Ottoman system of government.¹⁵ As far as it is possible to tell, given the reticence of the Ottoman sources, one of the points of issue, as we have seen, was Constantinople. Mehmed II and his advisers urged its conquest, while Murad II wished to preserve the old accommodations.

On balance, angering the Ottoman ruler was a risk worth taking. The council itself was testimony to Byzantium's renewed prestige in the West. Latin attitudes to Byzantium had changed thanks to the Conciliar movement, which strove not only to end the Great Schism but also to reform the Latin Church. Its emphasis on the council as the supreme body within the Church brought Western ecclesiology closer to the Byzantine ideal of the pentarchy, which vested final authority on ecclesiastical matters in the five patriarchates united in an ecumenical council. The reunion of the Latin and Byzantine Churches became a matter of urgency for the papacy, once the struggle was under way between Pope Eugenius IV (1431–47) and the conciliarists, who in 1431 assembled at the council of Basel. Both sides in their different ways appealed for support from the Byzantine emperor and patriarch. Flattering to Byzantine *amour propre* was the suggestion that once the Churches returned in communion Byzantium would be able to contribute to the reformation of the Latin Church.¹⁶ This was an argument used by the Emperor John VIII Palaiologos to win over waverers. It helped to convince the Patriarch Joseph, who came to see a Union Council as a stage on which to demonstrate the ecumenical authority of the patriarchs of Constantinople. To give this substance he ensured that there was representation of the Churches of Russia and Trebizond at the council. Equally, he understood the necessity of supporting the patriarchal authority of the papacy against the pretensions of the conciliarists of Basel.

For the last time the council of Ferrara Florence provided Byzantium with an international stage.¹⁷ Because we know that Constantinople will fall within a few short years, because we have been misled by anti-union propaganda, it

is usual to portray the council as a humiliating experience for the Byzantine delegation. Quite the contrary! In most ways it was a triumph. In the debates the Byzantine spokesmen were usually able to hold their own. After an inconclusive discussion of the doctrine of purgatory, it was agreed that the council should concentrate on the major difference between the two Churches: this was the Latin addition of the *filioque* to the creed with its apparent implication of a double procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and *from the Son*. The Greeks were able to cast doubt on the validity of any addition to the creed, while conceding that the reasoning behind the addition of the *filioque* clarified the theology of the procession of the Holy Spirit. This in turn produced an important admission on the part of the Latins: that there was only a single source of the Holy Spirit and that it was wrong to think in terms of a double procession. This provided a strong enough basis for agreement on a Union of Churches. The price was the alienation of a small group which had formed within the Byzantine delegation around Mark Eugenikos, who felt that the compromise was a form of words designed to mask the real differences separating Rome and Constantinople.

The activities of this group have always cast a shadow over the success of the union negotiations. They delayed the official proclamation of the union at Constantinople until the very eve of its final fall.¹⁸ It was in the interests of Mark Eugenikos and his followers to present the council as a humiliation for the Greeks and the Union as imposed by the papacy. This was a travesty, but nevertheless widely believed. It has obscured the immediate importance of the council of Ferrara Florence, which was to raise Byzantium's profile in the West. Members of the Byzantine delegation, the imperial party to the fore, were objects of intense interest to an Italian public, as the numerous portraits of John VIII Palaiologos made at the time go to show. The Patriarch Joseph died at Florence just before the close of the council. He was given a magnificent tomb in the church of S. Maria Novella. It is perhaps the grandest and most poignant reminder of the respect accorded to the Byzantine delegation by the council. The patriarch inspired affection. He was very close to the Catholic archbishop of Ragusa (Dubrovnik), who was also a Slavophone.¹⁹

This is just one example of the way that outside the sessions of the council Byzantines fraternised with their opposite numbers. Soon after the council assembled at Ferrara, Cardinal Cesarini, a leading figure on the papal side, invited members of the Byzantine delegation, the philosopher Gemistos Plethon among them, to dine with him, so that they could discuss philosophy.²⁰ There was a thirst among the Italian humanists gathered for the council to learn more about ancient Greek philosophy. The success of Gemistos Plethon's lectures on the differences between Plato and Aristotle

given in Florence is therefore not as surprising as is often made out.²¹ Ever since Manuel Chrysoloras's brief tenure more than forty years earlier of a chair of Greek at Florence's *Studium*, there was a growing interest in the classical Greek past among the city's elite, thanks to the prompting of Florence's chancellor Leonardo Bruni, who had been one of Chrysoloras's original and most distinguished pupils.²² What was new was the willingness of young Italians to go to Byzantium in order to receive instruction in classical Greek language and literature.

The result was a much better appreciation of one side of Byzantine culture by Italian scholars and enthusiasts. With it came a demand for Greek manuscripts by the likes of Giovanni Aurispa, who served as Latin secretary to Manuel II Palaiologos. When he returned to the West in 1423 he brought with him 238 Greek manuscripts.²³ There was also a demand for classical antiquities and *objets d'art* to stock the cabinets of Italian rulers and humanists: a demand satisfied by merchants such as Ciriaco of Ancona,²⁴ who was something more than an antiques dealer. His obsessive interest in the classical past impelled him to record as much of it as he could. In his own time this made him more or less unique. He would have no successors until the mid-sixteenth century. He was fortunate that his years of travel in the Levant coincided with the relatively peaceful conditions that prevailed for much of the early fifteenth century. Though very little remains of his *Commentaria* – his record of his travels around the Aegean and elsewhere – enough survives to show how easy it was at this time to move between different territories. Ciriaco was able to satisfy his classical interests thanks to the contacts he built up among the many courts of the Levant, including the Byzantine and the Ottoman. He knew Gemistos Plethon from before the council of Ferrara Florence and did much to spread his renown as a philosopher. Such was Plethon's reputation in Italy that in 1464 – twelve years after his death – the Despot of Rimini, Sigismondo Malatesta, had his remains exhumed from their tomb in Mistra in the Peloponnese and reburied in the Tempio Malatestiano at Rimini with the legend 'Prince of Philosophers of his time'.²⁵

II

Byzantium's revival after 1402 owed something to diplomatic sleight of hand, but behind it there was some substance in the shape of the recovery of Constantinople. Because Mehmed II began the transformation of Constantinople into a great Islamic city, its new splendours have left the impression that before 1453 Constantinople was dying on its feet. It is usual to think of it in the early fifteenth century as a failed city, as a place where a few thousand

inhabitants cowered in the vast spaces protected by its walls, where agriculture and market gardening were the main activities. This impression owes much to the famous map of Constantinople attached to Cristoforo Buondelmonti's description of the Aegean, the *Liber Insularum Archipelagi*, where a few ancient buildings, notably St Sophia, dominate the townscape.²⁶ In conventional fashion there are a scattering of houses, but this means very little because Pera across the Golden Horn from Constantinople is shown in exactly the same way, despite being famed for the density of its buildings. Constantinople in the early fifteenth century was far from being a ghost town, though the ancient monuments, many dating from Justinian's reign and before, were the features which made the deepest impression on visitors to the city and contributed to the air of venerable decay.

Constantinople in its final phase was much reduced, if compared with its great days before 1204, when Villehardouin, the chronicler of the fourth crusade, reckoned its population at around 400,000. We have one precise figure to help us to estimate its population on the eve of its final fall. The Byzantine historian Sphrantzes gives 4,773 as the number of Byzantine defenders of Constantinople at the beginning of the siege in April 1453.²⁷ This converts into a native population of some 40,000–50,000, which is rather lower than the figure given by Joseph Bryennios in a speech delivered around 1415, where he estimated the total population of the city at upwards of 70,000.²⁸ The difference may be more apparent than real, since Bryennios was offering a conventional figure. There were in any case large numbers of foreigners to be taken into account. Some of these were permanent residents, though the majority consisted of a floating population of seafarers and adventurers attracted by the opportunities that Constantinople offered. It was still the largest city in Romania, as Latins called the lands of the old Byzantine Empire. Though not as large as Venice, Florence, Genoa, Milan and Naples, it stood comparison with other major Italian cities of the time. This represents a considerable demographic recovery, when compared with the closing years of the fourteenth century when the city was under blockade from Bayezid's armies. Surviving from that time is a unique document, which has been preserved in the patriarchal register. It contains a list of the marriages celebrated in Constantinople during the nine months from August 1399 to April 1400. There were only forty of them,²⁹ which reflects the extraordinary circumstances created by the Ottoman blockade, but also reveals a society close to dissolution. However, once the danger of a Turkish conquest had receded Constantinople appears to have made some sort of a recovery. It was hampered by outbreaks of plague, but helped by the comparative peace that now existed between Venice and Genoa. Their commercial wars, which had punctuated

the fourteenth century, more or less came to an end after the treaty of Turin in 1381, which brought the damaging war of Chioggia, as it was called, to an end.³⁰ The comparative peace of the early fifteenth century worked to Constantinople's advantage. If long-distance trade remained largely in the hands of the Venetians and the Genoese, Greeks played a valuable role as middlemen and retailers, while short-haul voyages around the shores of the Aegean, the sea of Marmora and the Black Sea were a preserve of Greek shipping and sea captains, who happily worked for Italians and Turks as well as on their own account. There are good reasons for believing that without Greeks acting in their various capacities the economy of the region could scarcely have functioned so effectively.³¹ They ensured the smooth running of the commercial system, in the same way that in the political sphere Byzantine rulers and diplomats worked with a measure of success to maintain a balance of power that favoured not just Byzantium's continued existence, but even increased its standing.

What we are witnessing are the final stages of Byzantium's transformation into a city-state, which gave it new strengths but also increased its vulnerability.³² Outside the Peloponnese and the odd island, such as Lemnos,³³ it lost any significant agrarian base. Most Greek speakers were now subjects of other powers, whether Latin or Turk. Byzantium derived its wealth almost exclusively from trade and business. It was consequently beholden to the Venetians and the Genoese, who were the dominant commercial powers. Byzantine government was more sensitive than ever to the dictates of trade for two main reasons: in the first place, large numbers of the Byzantine aristocracy had gone into commerce as a way of compensating for the loss of their estates, and, in the second, successful businessmen often acquired aristocratic status, which they passed on to their descendants. The best example is the Notaras family. The founder of the family's fortunes was George Notaras, who moved from Monemvasia to Constantinople in the 1340s. His son Nicholas was still more astute. He obtained both Genoese and Venetian citizenship, which he also acquired for his sons. He died in 1423 leaving a vast fortune, which put him on the same footing as the greatest families of Venice and Genoa. His son Loukas Notaras became the most powerful figure at the Byzantine court in its last days. He did not engage in trade, but he nursed the family fortunes, to such good effect that even after the fall of Constantinople the surviving members of the family were able to enjoy a comfortable exile in Italy.³⁴

The role of families such as the Notaras was not dissimilar to that of the patrician families which guided the destinies of Genoa, Venice, Pisa and Florence. Occasionally they appear as shipowners or even as sea captains, but they were mainly financiers and retailers. A vivid picture of Byzantine

business comes from the account book of Giacomo Badoer, a Venetian merchant established at Constantinople.³⁵ It covers the years 1436 to 1440. Nearly a third of Badoer's customers were Greek. Of these just under a half are given the title *kyr*, which Badoer equates with the Italian *ser*. It is a rough and ready guide to elite status. It is immediately apparent that they controlled banking and brokerage, and the retail trade in cloth and spices. A group of them are described as *bazarioti*.³⁶ There were a variety of markets in Constantinople but these *bazarioti* seem to be connected with the Forum of Constantine or the 'Old Forum', as it appears in Badoer's account book, not the livelier market down by the Golden Horn. Badoer was not only dealing with Greeks from Constantinople but Greeks from all points of the compass: from Candia in Crete, from Edirne and Bursa,³⁷ the twin Ottoman capitals, from Serres in Macedonia, and across the Black Sea from Samsun, Trebizond and Agathopolis. This suggests two things: that Greeks were the lifeblood of day-to-day economic activity. They held together the politically fragmented Levantine world. The second is obvious – that Constantinople remained a beacon for Greeks whatever regime, Latin or Turkish, they happened to live under.

Badoer's account book offers only a limited insight into the workings of Constantinopolitan society in its last phase. The Byzantines he dealt with were mostly in the retail trade. They represented just under a third of his clientele, though the capital invested was proportionately far less. He imported largely Western consumer goods, which were in demand on the markets or in the great houses of Constantinople. He exported raw materials needed in the West. Constantinople acted as a collection centre for goods coming from the Black Sea and the eastern Mediterranean, as well as overland from Thrace and Anatolia. This export–import trade was very largely in the hands of Italian merchants, such as Badoer. Greeks had a subordinate role, either organising the transport of goods from the ports of the Black Sea and of the Sea of Marmora and occasionally from further afield – from Crete, for example – or running the retail trade in Constantinople. A high proportion of Badoer's Greek clientele came from the Byzantine elite, but only two or three of his clients belonged to the highest ranks of the aristocracy; one was *chapetanio* Asanes,³⁸ who may possibly be Paul Asanes, governor of Constantinople during the Emperor John VIII's absence in the West from 1438 to 1440; another was Loukas Notaras,³⁹ who is given his proper title of *mesazon* or chief minister. Finally, there was Constantine Palaiologos,⁴⁰ governor of Agathopolis, one of the few remaining Byzantine possessions on the Black Sea. He was working in partnership with a Demetrios Notaras,⁴¹ who held the position of *kommerkiarios* or customs officer. In their official capacities they were offering Badoer a large shipment of grain, a trade which was still to a

degree state-regulated. Demetrios Notaras will almost certainly have obtained a post in the customs service through his family connection with Loukas Notaras, who may not have had any direct interest in trade but had a stake in the customs service.⁴² The majority of Badoer's clientele appear to have had some connection with the great houses of Constantinople. They are likely to have belonged to cadet lines and to have made their own way in the world. Retail business and banking were the preferred options. The most successful would have been numbered among the *archontes* of Constantinople. Below them in easy gradations were all kinds of trades, professions and callings down to the boatmen and muleteers who did business with Badoer and were vital to the functioning of the city's trade.

Contemporaries found it nearly impossible to provide a satisfactory classification of Constantinopolitan society. A patriarchal address of 1401 to the people of Constantinople divided them into the *archontes*, clergy, priest-monks and monks, and the whole Christian community.⁴³ In other words, it treated the vast bulk of the population as an undifferentiated mass. This was in line with the traditional division of Byzantine society into the powerful and the poor,⁴⁴ but with the difference that it recognised the monks and clergy as a distinct element, which had always been the case. The term for the powerful was now *archontes*, which had come to mean nothing more than those with power. But there were different kinds of *archontes*.⁴⁵ At the top were the senatorial (*synkletikoi*) *archontes*, who seem to have constituted a small group of those holding the most important offices of state together with the heads of the greatest families of Constantinople. They were closely attached to the imperial court, but their membership of the senate seems to have given them some independence of action. Their power was expressed through their mansions. The preacher Joseph Bryennios was critical of the care and money they lavished on their palaces, which contrasted with their neglect of the city walls.⁴⁶ An admiring description of the house built by Theodore Palaiologos Kantakouzenos in the early fifteenth century revels in its luxury and the wide vistas it enjoyed from its position on one of Constantinople's eminences. It would have vied in magnificence with the palaces of the Venetian patriciate. The remains of a palace which now goes by the name of Mermerkule give an idea of the scale of these aristocratic residences. It is situated at the meeting point of the land and sea walls on the Marmora side of the city.⁴⁷ It resembles another, but better preserved mansion, the Tekfur Saray, which was also built into the walls of Constantinople, but at the other end of the Theodosian walls at their juncture with the Blachernai walls. There are good grounds for believing that by the fifteenth century the Tekfur Saray had replaced the neighbouring Blachernai palace as the main

imperial residence.⁴⁸ The area of the city along the walls offered distinct advantages, which appealed to emperor and aristocracy alike. It was lightly populated and there were gardens, orchards and fields. It was also, as an early fifteenth-century Castilian traveller noted, an area of rich monasteries set 'in gardens and water and vineyards' which resembled large towns.⁴⁹ Paradoxically the walls offered security from the turmoil of city life. It was here that the aristocracy also liked to have their residences. They were attracted by the illusion of *rus in urbe*, which had always had an appeal for the Byzantine aristocracy.⁵⁰

Distinct from the senatorial *archontes*, who comprised the upper ranks of the Byzantine aristocracy, were those known as political *archontes*, meaning that they came from the citizen body (*politai/politeia*). These were the most successful bankers and merchants, but without necessarily having a place at court. How they became *archontes* is never made clear, nor do we know whether there was some institutional basis to their authority. Were, for instance, the demarchs, who had responsibility for Constantinople's neighbourhoods, included in their number? At least the existence of these political *archontes* demonstrates that Constantinople constituted a source of power independent of the imperial court and the patriarchate.

The clergy in its various forms appears as another distinct group within Constantinopolitan society. At their head were the ecclesiastical *archontes*. These were the officers of St Sophia together with the clergy of the major churches of the capital, such as the Blachernai, and the *hegoumenoi* of the more important monasteries, such as Stoudios and the Pantokrator. These belonged to the elite, and substantial salaries alone would have marked them off from the rank and file of the clergy and monks. It has recently been argued that there was a clear political division within the upper reaches of Byzantine society between the lay *archontes* around the emperor and the ecclesiastical *archontes*. The former favoured a rapprochement with the West and generally supported the Union of Churches, while the latter opposed both imperial intervention in ecclesiastical affairs and the Union of Churches.⁵¹ In favour of this line of argument is the alacrity with which the majority of ecclesiastical *archontes* repudiated their adhesion to the Union of Churches in the immediate aftermath of the Council of Ferrara Florence. This was given a sharper edge with the creation of the *Synaxis*, which, starting as a forum for anti-unionist opinion, soon became a Church within a Church.⁵² Its influence within Constantinopolitan society was pervasive.⁵³ This was testimony to the hold exercised within Constantinople by the clergy. Western travellers were struck by the prominence of members of the clergy on the streets of Constantinople. Given the place of the clerical order in Western society, this suggests that at Constantinople the

clergy was even more conspicuous. Its members were also deeply embedded in Constantinopolitan society and contributed to its vibrant character. To judge by the number of priests bound over by the patriarchal court to keep the peace, they also constituted a refractory segment of the capital's population. They were great frequenters of taverns, which were a feature of Constantinopolitan life, just as they were in any medieval city. In order to survive, priests worked at various trades, which was a source of disquiet to the ecclesiastical authorities. The patriarchal court threatened to defrock one priest if he continued to run errands for *archontes*, on the grounds that this demeaned his priestly status. A priest monk promised the court that he would never again leave his cell to work as a cooper or to sell books at the forum.⁵⁴

The division of Constantinopolitan society into *archontes* and clergy leaves out of account the vast mass of lay society, the *demos*. It is difficult not to sympathise with this refusal to categorise lay society, because there were no obvious institutional or legal divisions. There was no longer a guild system, such as that which articulated the society of Italian cities. Such organisation as there was came in the form of the division of the city into different quarters, each with its own demarch and corps of notaries and its own way of life.⁵⁵ Outside the commercial centre of the city, which stretched from the Forum of Constantine down to the Golden Horn, these neighbourhoods were very like villages and their activities would have been largely agricultural. Vineyards and other cultivations formed an important item of property in the last days of Constantinople. This was in part a function of the loss of population in the mid-fourteenth century, as we discover from what happened to a residential area near the hippodrome, where the inhabitants paid rent to the church of St John the Theologian. By the end of the fourteenth century the population had drifted away, leaving the church impoverished. One of the political *archontes* agreed to restore the church, but to provide it with an income he bought out the one or two remaining inhabitants and turned the area into an agricultural estate.⁵⁶ By way of contrast, Constantinople's commercial centre remained a bustling place with all kinds of trades and activities going on. These revolved around the two major markets, one at the forum of Constantine, which seems to have been more of an exchange, and the other along the Golden Horn, where foodstuffs were the main items on display. There were all kinds of workshops, but, as Nicolas Oikonomides has observed, they catered mainly for a local clientele.⁵⁷ Glass was no longer manufactured nor woollen cloths nor silks. These were mainly Italian imports. By contrast, naval stores were much in demand at Constantinople, giving plenty of work to coopers, rope-makers and the like. There was even one workshop manufacturing gunpowder.⁵⁸

Life in the quarters went on with very little reference to the powers that be. It revolved around the churches and the taverns. Social distinctions were not in evidence. This was partly to do with a complicated family structure, in which there were marked differences of wealth and standing within the extended family. Many, if not most, Constantinopolitan families disposed of substantial amounts of property, in which even its poorest members had a stake, be it just a share of a dwelling or a workshop. But the poor continued to make up a distinct element of the city's population, as we learn from Joseph Bryennios, who insisted that the upkeep of the walls of Constantinople was an act of charity on a par with caring for the poor, but with one important difference:

*Repairing the city walls will give succour to two or three, who go hungry; six or seven, who go thirsty; twenty or thirty vagrants; sixty or seventy mendicants; two or three hundred sick and infirm; and six or seven hundred of those languishing in jail, but this hardly compares with the benefits it will bring both now and in the future to the tens of thousands, who have no experience of poverty . . .*⁵⁹

Apart from the light this passage sheds on perceptions of the different categories of the poor, its main interest lies in the way that it reveals that poverty was not a serious problem at Constantinople in its declining years. There are few, if any, signs of utter destitution. Cristoforo Buondelmonti even singles out gluttony as the besetting sin of the citizens of Constantinople.⁶⁰

At first sight, it comes as a surprise that the Constantinopolitan economy could support a population of around 50,000, always remembering that this included a sizeable elite. Despite the importance of agricultural activities within the city walls, these were hardly sufficient to feed the whole population, while manufactures were minimal. Constantinople remained what it had always been: a consumer rather than a producer. To judge by Badoer's account book it imported far more than it exported. The gap was largely covered by the benefits accruing from the flow of trade through the markets of Constantinople. The more enterprising of its citizens were able to take advantage of this by providing financial and other commercial services. In addition, there were still the remains of Constantinople's accumulated wealth to fall back on. At its most basic, this meant selling off precious building materials. At its worst, there were gangs, who went around stealing icons and melting down their silver casings.⁶¹ It was a delicate balance, but Constantinople paid its way and may even have enjoyed a modest prosperity, which was sufficient to maintain the population at a relatively stable level. Constantinople was far from moribund in its last days. There is plenty of evidence of churches and monasteries being repaired or rebuilt, while, as we have seen, the rich were

still building their palaces, but no large-scale works were undertaken, to compare with that done at St Sophia in the mid-fourteenth century, when repairs were made to the semi-dome and part of the dome, which had collapsed in the earthquake of 1346. In 1434 the church of the Blachernai burnt down. It was one of the city's major shrines, which contained some of the most precious relics of the Theotokos, but the damage was such that restoration was not even contemplated. It was an event, which left the chronicler George Sphrantzes shaken and prompted a lament from the future Cardinal Isidore.⁶² It added a sense of foreboding to the atmosphere in Constantinople. Indirectly, it may help to explain why just before the fall of Constantinople students of John Argyropoulos – the leading teacher of the time – decided to make a copy of the rarest work by the great medical authority of antiquity, Galen. As its title, 'About not being distressed', suggests, its purpose was more psychological than strictly medical. The occasion for this treatise was a great fire that destroyed large parts of Rome in AD 192. Galen hoped to bring comfort in the face of disaster by his assurance that despite considerable personal losses he was not downhearted.⁶³ What text was more appropriate to the needs of the people of Constantinople on the eve of its final fall! It suggests that, bad as things were at the bitter end Constantinopolitan society retained its *sang froid* and was not about to implode. It had survived a dangerous crisis at the turn of the fourteenth century. It had recovered its equilibrium in the aftermath of the Ottoman defeat at Ankara in 1402. It had seen off an Ottoman siege in 1422. A major strength was its continuity. It had preserved its rituals and festivals and its tenacious social ties. Overriding any divisions, such as that between the unionists and anti-unionists, was a consciousness of being a Constantinopolitan.

III

Part of the fascination of the last phase of Byzantium from 1402 to 1453 lies in the way that once again it had been forced to reinvent itself; this time as a city-state. But it had done so while maintaining the essentials of its civilisation intact. At its heart was its imperial ideology, which found its most effective expression in the ceremonial of the Byzantine court, which continued to impress outsiders. Byzantium maintained its ecumenical pretensions largely through the activities of the patriarchate, which extended throughout the Orthodox world. It also preserved its cultural traditions, which were admired more than ever. Thanks to the new-found Italian interest in classical antiquity, the reputation of Byzantium for scholarship had never been higher than in the half century before the fall of Constantinople, even if the modern

consensus is that it did not attain the heights reached in the early Palaiologan Renaissance by the likes of Maximos Planoudes, Theodore Magistros, and their pupil Demetrios Triklinios.⁶⁴ If in the early fifteenth century, with the exception of Plethon, Byzantium did not boast any scholars of the first rank, there were some excellent teachers, men such as John Chortasmenos, to whom we shall return. As happened on other occasions in Byzantine history, a demand for education was an important part of the reaction to a crisis. This is not altogether surprising, given the high value that was always placed on education at Byzantium. After 1402 a new factor came into play. It was becoming clear that there were excellent opportunities in Italy, which had scarcely existed before, for somebody with a good grounding in classical Greek. This was confirmed and reinforced by the council of Ferrara Florence. The result was a resurgence of the humanist element in Byzantine elite culture, which had been eclipsed since the mid-fourteenth century by the triumph of mysticism, the exponents of which were deeply suspicious of the secularism involved in the study of the classics.

Byzantine humanism for obvious and, some would say, good reasons has never much appealed to modern taste, which is ironic, since the same cannot be said of Italian humanism, whose promoters were often eager to complete their education at Constantinople. They learnt much from their Byzantine counterparts, who were responsible for the revival of education and learning which took place at Constantinople after 1402 under the auspices of Manuel II Palaiologos. The emperor was a scholar in his own right and an exponent of many of the traditional genres of Byzantine letters. In some ways, he tried to live up to the ideal of a philosopher king. He was his own court orator, writing a series of speeches on notable events, as well as composing a funeral oration for his brother Theodore.⁶⁵ When need be, he became a theologian. He wrote up as a dialogue the debates he had had in 1391 with an Ottoman scholar over the relative merits of Christianity and Islam. While in Paris he defended the Byzantine position on the procession of the Holy Spirit against a monk of St Denys. Another product of his stay in Paris was an *ekphrasis* (or description) of a tapestry in the Louvre.⁶⁶ Manuel was concerned with questions of a moral order. He set out his doubts about marriage in the form of a Platonic dialogue with his mother. His proposition was that his recent marriage to the Serbian princess Helena Drageses had burdened him with new cares at a time when the political situation required all his attention. But he allowed himself to be convinced by his mother's traditional views on marriage: an emperor needed a consort, both as a helpmate and as a spiritual companion and guide. There were dynastic reasons too, but perhaps the most important consideration was the emperor's role as an icon of his people. If he

neglected marriage, so would they.⁶⁷ Best known of his works are his *Letters*, of which sixty-eight survive.⁶⁸ They are the last significant contribution to Byzantine epistolography and display all its maddening characteristics: for educated Byzantines letters were as much exercises in style as they were a means of communication. Manuel's letters were written in an overwrought Greek and were intended for a select audience composed of scholars and members of the court. These literary circles or *theatra* were a consistent feature of Byzantine intellectual life, but rarely was an emperor their presiding spirit.

It was through his *theatron* that Manuel II hoped to foster the revival of Byzantine intellectual life after 1402. Its members included most of the prominent scholars of the time. Among them was John Chortasmenos († 1431),⁶⁹ who was a patriarchal notary before becoming bishop of Selymbria.⁷⁰ He was also, to judge by the quality of his pupils, the most notable teacher of his time. He taught at least three of the leading members of the Byzantine delegation to Florence, Mark Eugenikos, Bessarion and George Scholarios. His zeal for the classics even rubbed off on one young aristocrat he taught.⁷¹ This was George Kantakouzenos, who built up a library in his Peloponnesian lair at Kalavryta. Its classical holdings were of such renown that in 1436 Ciriaco of Ancona made a detour through the mountains to visit it. A copy of Herodotus he found there was more than adequate recompense for his troubles.⁷² Chortasmenos was at the heart of intellectual activity after 1402. His work was designed to rescue Byzantium's literary and scientific heritage. He was a great collector and copier of manuscripts. A pattern emerges from his choice of manuscripts. It reveals a determination to preserve the achievements of the so-called early Palaiologan Renaissance; of scholars such as Maximos Planoudes and Theodore Metochites. Among Chortasmenos's most prized possessions was Planoudes's own edition of the *Moralia* of Plutarch. He took the greatest pains to preserve Metochites's astronomical work, an area in which he had a strong personal interest. Chortasmenos seems to have started to collect manuscripts during the Turkish blockade of Constantinople at the end of the fourteenth century at a time when the only hope of delivery was divine intervention. It was a last chance. He took it in the best way he knew by working to pass on Byzantium's Hellenic heritage to a new generation. He deserves recognition for his contribution to the high intellectual level of the Byzantine delegation to the council of Ferrara Florence.

Chortasmenos was not a Hellenist in the mould of a Gemistos Plethon, who believed that the classical past held the key to a renewal of Byzantium. Chortasmenos remained a traditionalist, in the sense that Orthodoxy remained the motivating force behind his intellectual activities. He saw sin as the main danger to a Byzantine recovery after 1402. He was opposed to

negotiations over the Union of Churches. He did not believe that any good would come from compromise with the Latins and feared for the spiritual health of those, such as Manuel Chrysoloras, who spent too much time in the West on diplomatic duties.⁷³ Chortasmenos was close to Joseph Bryennios, who was the most powerful defender of Orthodoxy of the time. Bryennios was Manuel II's court preacher and held in very high esteem. His early career had been spent in Crete, where he had been sent to strengthen the Orthodoxy of its native inhabitants. After his return to Constantinople around 1402 his main task was to instil moral discipline into its inhabitants.⁷⁴ He represented the stern, uncompromising core of the Orthodox tradition, which was puritan in its intensity. That he should have been on such good terms with Manuel II Palaiologos and John Chortasmenos, whose intellectual orientation can best be described as humanist, tells us two things: that Byzantine 'humanism' was informed by Orthodoxy and that it had recovered the prestige it had lost with the triumph of mysticism in the mid-fourteenth century. It marked a return to that balance between the classical tradition and Orthodoxy which was a characteristic of elite culture at Byzantium, but it was a precarious balance which was threatened by those groups which Chortasmenos feared and Bryennios denounced: the Hellenists, around Gemistos Plethon, and Latin sympathisers, such as Manuel Chrysoloras.

While Chortasmenos was concerned with the preservation of a traditional literary culture, it was his opponents who seemed to offer something novel. Plethon presented his version of Neoplatonism as an alternative to or possibly as a fulfilment of Orthodoxy.⁷⁵ Its attractions were such that one of Chortasmenos's brightest pupils, Bessarion, left Constantinople for Mistra, in order to sit at Plethon's feet. Despite a glittering ecclesiastical career, Bessarion never lost his admiration for his master nor his taste for Neoplatonism.⁷⁶ Though now reckoned a chimera, Plethon's plans to recreate Byzantine society on the lines of ancient Sparta, even his advocacy of a return to the Olympian Gods, added an excitement to Byzantine intellectual life which had long been absent. In some ways it shared and even anticipated features of the Italian Renaissance. At Florence Plethon found himself lionised by Italian humanists, who persuaded him to give a public lecture – usually referred to as *De Differentiis* – setting out the differences between Plato and Aristotle. It was designed for a Western audience and took the form of general criticism of Aristotle's approach and a detailed exposition of Plato's theory of forms, which was little understood in the West.

This lecture contributed to Plethon's mystique, but in the short term it had little impact on humanist circles in Italy.⁷⁷ The death in 1444 of Leonardo Bruni, the chancellor of Florence, removed the one Italian humanist who was

well enough read in Platonic texts to carry forward any debate. It was quite otherwise in Byzantium. It sparked off a polemic which set George Scholarios,⁷⁸ the future patriarch Gennadios, against Plethon on the relative merits of Plato and Aristotle.⁷⁹ Plethon's dismissal of Aristotle in his lecture at Florence perturbed the Emperor John VIII Palaiologos, on whose behalf somebody, almost certainly George Scholarios, wrote to Plethon seeking clarification on one or two points, which the latter duly provided.⁸⁰ This only prompted George Scholarios to publish a full-scale refutation of Plethon's *De Differentiis*. He may well have felt, with some justification, that as the leading Byzantine exponent of Aristotelian thought he had been one of Plethon's targets. It would certainly have damaged his intellectual reputation if he had made no effort to respond. He began by making disparaging remarks about those Platonists who had persuaded Plethon to give his lecture in the first place. They knew as much about philosophy as Plethon did about dancing. Had he not heard how they had been recently worsted in public debate?⁸¹ The Italian background was important, because, as Plethon later reminded him, Scholarios had cut a poor figure among Italian intellectuals.⁸² Scholarios's main concern was to dispose of Plethon's contention that Aristotle inclined towards atheism, which followed from his failure to affirm that God created the world. It was also hard to reconcile Aristotle's insistence on the eternity of matter with the idea of divine creation. What more than anything revealed the weakness of Scholarios's case was that he was forced back on special pleading. He agreed that there were no passages in Aristotle's surviving works which explicitly state that God was the creator of the world, but insisted that it was implicit in Aristotle's conception of God as the first mover. Nor should it be forgotten, Scholarios urged, that there were lost sections of the *Metaphysics*, which might well have clarified the issue. This last remark earned him Plethon's scorn, but in a particularly revealing way. It struck Plethon that, because his opponent was unable to find what he wanted in Aristotle, he had invoked passages from Thomas Aquinas.⁸³ This was not strictly true, but Scholarios's debt to Aquinas was well known.

It becomes clear that the dispute between Scholarios and Plethon over the differences between Plato and Aristotle was more than academic. Plethon believed passionately that Plato offered Byzantium a chance of moral and political regeneration, something that would have seemed ludicrous to earlier generations of Byzantine scholars. Scholarios did not need to advance similar claims for Aristotle, because his thought was the dominant force in Byzantine intellectual life. The assimilation of elements of Thomas Aquinas's work had deepened Byzantine understanding of Aristotle. This was among the major intellectual achievements of the last phase of Byzantine history. The process

began in the mid-fourteenth century with the translation of parts of Aquinas's *Summa contra Gentiles* by Demetrios Kydones, who incidentally may have been one of Plethon's teachers. The value of Aquinas's work was apparent not just to Latin sympathisers, such as Kydones, but to all shades of religious opinion at Byzantium. However, little more was done in the way of further translations until Scholarios took the decision to learn Latin and investigate Latin theology at first hand. It was a bold move, because it exposed him to the usual accusations that he was a Latin sympathiser and was about to take the path to Rome. Fortunately for him the negotiations over the Union of Churches meant that his knowledge of Latin recommended him to the Emperor John VIII Palaiologos. Scholarios's devotion to Thomas Aquinas meant that assimilation of Western scholasticism was taken a stage further at Byzantium. This seems incongruous, given Scholarios's leadership of opposition to the Union of Florence, but becomes less so when it is remembered that much of Aquinas's thought harmonised with the Aristotelian tradition at Byzantium. Scholarios had no interest in Aquinas's theology, only his methodology, which he used to inject new rigour into Orthodox theology.⁸⁴

A major attraction of Aristotle to Christian thinkers – and particularly to Scholarios – was the apparent similarity of his thought to Christian teaching. Plethon's charge that Aristotle inclined rather towards atheism was a direct challenge to this line of thinking. Scholarios counter-attacked by reminding Plethon that there was a rumour about him doing the rounds, insinuating that he was constructing an ideal system of laws, which was full of Hellenic nonsense. It was nothing less than an accusation that Plethon's devotion to Plato went far beyond mere intellectual interest and amounted to a renunciation of Christianity. Scholarios dedicated his refutation of Plethon's *De Differentiis* to the future emperor, the Despot Constantine Palaiologos. This again was a veiled threat, because Plethon was a member of the despot's court at Mistra. It may have had some effect because it took Plethon nearly five years to reply. He claimed, somewhat unconvincingly, that he had been unable to obtain a copy of Scholarios's *Defence of Aristotle*. But, when it finally came, his *Reply* was contemptuously dismissive. He underlined the flaws in Scholarios's character. He was in Plethon's words a man in a state of schism with himself,⁸⁵ but this was as nothing to the defects of his intellect. He had a weak grasp of Aristotle's thought and knew next to nothing about Plato. Plethon's main concern was to demolish his opponent's contention that Aristotle implicitly accepted God as creator of the Universe, which allowed him to remind Scholarios that by way of contrast Plato quite explicitly subscribed to the notion of a Creator God. In past debates this would have been used to demonstrate that the superiority of Plato's thought over Aristotle's derived from its anticipation of

Christian teaching, but this was of little interest to Plethon, who identified not Christianity but Plato's thought with the truth.⁸⁶

The controversy between Plethon and Scholarios may seem far removed from the practical concerns of the day, but underlying it was a debate over Byzantine identity. Plethon argued that it was Hellenic rather than Christian. The travails of the Byzantines were the consequence of their renunciation of the Hellenic ideal. Against this Scholarios's defence of Aristotle was an attempt to vindicate Orthodoxy as the core of Byzantine identity. By the time that Scholarios came to consider the implications in detail, Plethon was dead and Constantinople had fallen, which entirely altered the terms of the debate.⁸⁷ As we shall see, among the survivors in Constantinople the debate became central to the preservation of a sense of identity threatened with dissolution, while among the exiles in Italy it became part of their attempt to transplant Byzantine culture to the West.

The debate between Plethon and Scholarios on the relative merits of Aristotle and Plato was at an intellectual level which matched and probably surpassed the standard of earlier polemics on the topic.⁸⁸ It was testimony to the continued excellence of Byzantine scholarship. What is more, it revealed a culture that was no longer turned in on itself. In the past, intellectual controversy at Byzantium was impervious to outside influences. In contrast, the immediate origins of the debate between Plethon and Scholarios lay in changes occurring in Italy, where a new culture of humanism was challenging the scholasticism of the universities. This had echoes in Byzantium because of the influence that the thought of Thomas Aquinas was beginning to have on Byzantine theology. At this stage, it was only Byzantine scholars who had the expertise to articulate key issues. It would be another generation before Italian scholars could make a real contribution. As we shall see, they took the debate off in different directions. In its final phase Byzantine culture was the richer for its interaction with the West. Islam was a different matter. If Turkish habits and practices started to creep into everyday life at all levels of society, strictly Islamic influence was minimal. There was plenty of anti-Islamic polemic. It was not, however, the product of active debate with Islamic scholars, as had been the case earlier, but was designed for internal consumption.⁸⁹ Among leading Byzantine scholars, Plethon was one of the few willing to admit that the Ottomans derived great moral strengths from Islam. This may have been the result of residence as a young man at the Ottoman court, though it is important not to exaggerate the impact that this stay had on his intellectual development. His teacher there was a Jew, who was an expert in Averroes, an Arab commentator on Aristotle. Given Plethon's later antipathy towards Averroes, it looks as though his experiences

at the Ottoman court only went to reinforce his Hellenic instincts.⁹⁰ These found expression in the study of Plato, who, he believed, provided the moral strengths to combat Islam.

Far from being a dispute between two more or less isolated individuals, Scholarios's quarrel with Plethon involved a surprising number of the Byzantine elite. How could it be otherwise, when the emperor himself intervened and his successor was the dedicatee of a key text?⁹¹ Scholarios's *Defence of Aristotle* was so important to him that it had to go to Mark Eugenikos for approval before being made public. Each side had its supporters. A young scholar, Michael Apostoles, went out of his way to obtain a copy of Scholarios's *Defence* for Plethon. He used the good offices of Giovanni Dario (1414–94), a Venetian diplomat, then on a mission to Constantinople, for safe delivery,⁹² which incidentally reveals Western interest. Apostoles tried to obtain entry into Plethon's circles, presuming upon an acquaintance with another and more distinguished Byzantine scholar, John Argyropoulos, who was also involved on the edges of the debate between Scholarios and Plethon.⁹³

Argyropoulos was a few years older than Scholarios and received an imperial licence to teach in Constantinople before 1421. Despite his seniority he was not included among the scholars chosen to advise the emperor at the council of Ferrara Florence. It is perhaps no coincidence that a campaign was being mounted against him, accusing him of impiety and atheism. To defend himself against these charges and to discredit his opponents, John Argyropoulos composed a scabrous invective, entitled the *Comedy of Katablattas*, which is perhaps the most accomplished literary piece surviving from the last years of Byzantium.⁹⁴ It antedates its closest surviving parallels composed by Italian humanists. The work itself is entirely Byzantine in its effortless deployment of allusions to and quotations from classical Greek authors, pre-eminently Aristophanes and Demosthenes. It was written before John Argyropoulos went to Italy, which must mean that there was little direct Italian influence. It is rather an example of the convergence of interests that united Byzantine and Italian scholars at this juncture. What distinguishes the *Comedy of Katablattas* is the sheer mastery of form and exuberant vituperation. Equally, the Constantinople which serves as a backdrop emerges as a surprisingly vibrant place. Its markets and shops were well stocked and its people appeared to have recovered their *joie de vivre*.

Argyropoulos left Constantinople in a hurry in 1441 for Italy, where he studied at the University of Padua, graduating three years later in arts and medicine. He perfected his command of Latin and came back to Constantinople a convinced unionist. His return coincided with the publication of Scholarios's *Defence of Aristotle*. Determined to make his mark, he offered a defence of

Latin teaching on the Trinity, which not only revealed his pro-unionist sympathies but also posed awkward questions for both Scholarios and Plethon: the former because of his attachment to Thomas Aquinas, who had refined Latin teaching on the Trinity; the latter because Plato could be adduced to support the Latin position on the procession of the Holy Spirit. In his reply to Argyropoulos Plethon admitted that this was indeed the case, but then went on to restate traditional Orthodox teaching on the matter. Scholarios wrote to Plethon congratulating him on his defence of Orthodoxy. He had every reason to be grateful because it absolved him from making any reply to Argyropoulos, which in view of Scholarios's earlier convoluted expositions of Trinitarian doctrine he would have found difficult to do.⁹⁵ As it was, Scholarios forfeited imperial favour at the end of John VIII Palaiologos's reign, which coincided with Argyropoulos's appointment to the headship of the school attached to St John in Petra. His main duties were the teaching of medicine, which again underlines the close ties between Byzantium and Italy, because medicine was an area in which Byzantine practitioners remained highly respected.⁹⁶ Argyropoulos was able to move with ease between Italy and Byzantium, as a letter from the Italian humanist Francesco Filelfo reveals. Such was the latter's confidence in Argyropoulos's abilities that he entrusted him with the education of his son.⁹⁷

Argyropoulos's invective was something of a new departure but it invites comparison with a contemporary text known as *Mazaris*, which took the more traditional form of satire.⁹⁸ For the most part this follows the usual Lucianic narrative of a journey to Hades and back. It is divided into three distinct parts. The first and longest section takes as its starting point the plague that hit Constantinople in 1414. One of the victims was the *Mazaris* who is the protagonist of the satire. He found himself in Hades with the imperial secretary Holobolos as his guide. In typical fashion this provided a setting for making fun of figures at court. At the end Holobolos showed him how to escape from Hades, but advised him to seek his fortune in the Peloponnese. His experiences there provided the material for the second part of the satire, which is set during Manuel II Palaiologos's visit to the Peloponnese in the year 1415/1416. The third and concluding part is very short and consists of an exchange of letters between Holobolos and a Nikephoros Doukas Palaiologos Malakes, who was described as 'the best and most distinguished of physicians'. This correspondence is so inconsequential that it raises the question of why it was tagged on at the end and what the point was of giving such prominence to a character who only made the most fleeting of appearances in the main body of the text. Malakes is otherwise known only as the owner of a medical manuscript, but he had distinguished antecedents. He was

from Constantinople, but had recently settled at Mistra, possibly as physician to the Despot Theodore Palaiologos, who was then governing the Peloponnese on behalf of his father Manuel II. The despot was the dedicatee of a revised version of the satire, which closes with a request to the despot that it should only be read out at a safe distance from the Peloponnese. It is done in such a way that it is not clear whether the plea comes from Mazaris or from Malakes. But even if Malakes was the author of the satire, his obscurity leaves us little the wiser. The important thing is that *Mazaris* was commissioned as a court entertainment. It may not be as polished as earlier Lucianic satires, but it more than makes up for this by its vivid depiction of the petty jealousies of the imperial court. Although they mean almost nothing now, the personal references would have delighted the intended audience. The most obvious joke centred on Mazaris's unkind fate: to escape from Hades and be sent to the Peloponnese, which was another kind of hell for any self-respecting Constantinopolitan. It was a satire which could only have been produced by and for an elite that was recovering its self-confidence, which in its turn found expression in traditional literary forms.

Byzantine literary culture now had a momentum which allowed it to ride the initial impact of the fall of Constantinople. Nowhere is this seen more clearly than in the writing of history. The great series of Byzantine histories beginning in the early ninth century with the *Chronographia* of Theophanes the Confessor came to an end in the mid-fourteenth century with the *Histories* of Nikephoros Gregoras and the ex-emperor John Kantakouzenos. For the next century historical writings were meagre, consisting of brief chronological entries, known as short chronicles,⁹⁹ and occasional narratives of important events, such as John Kananos's account of Murad II's failure before Constantinople in 1422¹⁰⁰ and John Anagnostes's account of the fall of Thessaloniki to the Ottomans in 1430.¹⁰¹ Far more substantial is a memoir of the council of Florence by Silvester Syropoulos, who attended the council in his capacity as Grand Ecclesiarch of the Great Church.¹⁰² He signed the act of union, which was something he soon came to regret. His memoir, which was completed by 1445, takes on the character of an apology. Despite its strong anti-unionist bias it provides a detailed and convincing picture of the council. Syropoulos gives the theological issues short shrift, but is excellent on the manoeuvring behind the scenes and provides vivid pen portraits of the leading characters. It is a work of considerable sophistication, and prepares the way for that final flowering of the Byzantine historiographical tradition which was inspired by the fall of Constantinople. This came in the shape of the narratives of George Sphrantzes,¹⁰³ Doukas,¹⁰⁴ Michael Kritoboulos,¹⁰⁵ and Laonikos Khalkokondyles,¹⁰⁶ which will be considered in detail in the

next chapter.¹⁰⁷ Here it is sufficient to note that in their different ways they were accomplished pieces of work, which reflect high standards of education. What is more the four historians came from quite different backgrounds. Only the youngest, Laonikos Khalkokondyles, was an intellectual. He was born in Athens around 1423 and was a pupil of George Gemistos Plethon at Mistra in the 1440s. His *History* bears the imprint of his master's Hellenism.¹⁰⁸ George Sphrantzes was born around 1401 and was brought up with the future Emperor Constantine XI Palaiologos (1448–53), the fourth son of the Emperor Manuel II. He quickly became the trusted agent of the dynasty. He was a man of affairs. His *History* reads at times like a confidential report to his masters. Michael Kritoboulos came from the leading family of the island of Imbros, which was still part of the Byzantine Empire. He too was a man of affairs, but his *History* was the work of a man who knew his Thucydides. His guided tour around the sites of his native island impressed the antiquarian Ciriaco of Ancona, who described him as 'the learned and noble Imbriot'.¹⁰⁹ The fourth, Doukas, was born around 1400. He came from distinguished aristocratic lineage, but his grandfather fled from Constantinople in the mid-fourteenth century and found refuge with the Turkish emir of Aydin. Doukas himself went into Genoese service before entering the employment of the Gattilusio rulers of Mytilene. How and where he acquired a more than adequate mastery of literary Greek remains a mystery.¹¹⁰

The range of approaches displayed by the Byzantine historians of the fall of Constantinople reflects the richness of intellectual life in the last phase of Byzantine history, as does the variety of work produced by Byzantine scholars in the generation after 1453, whether in Italy or in lands now under Ottoman rule. Needless to say, the fall of Constantinople meant the destruction of a system of education which had for centuries underpinned Byzantine intellectual and literary life. As we shall see, it meant that Byzantium's intellectual traditions could only survive in an attenuated form under Ottoman domination, while in Italy they were reshaped to meet other needs.

IV

In the last phase of Byzantium's existence its artists and scholars were as much admired and in demand outside its frontiers as ever they were – perhaps more so. The success of the painter Theophanes 'the Greek' in Russia at the turn of the fourteenth century is well known.¹¹¹ At the same time another Byzantine painter, Manuel Eugenikos, was working for the Georgian prince of Mingrelia.¹¹² Some of the best Cretan painters were of Constantinopolitan origin, men such as Nicholas Philanthropenos, Alexios Apokaukos,¹¹³ and the brothers Manuel

and John Phokas.¹¹⁴ As their names suggest, their social origins were quite distinguished. Philanthropenos was a relative of the Patriarch Joseph II and a scion of the family which had ruled in Thessaly. In 1435 he became chief mosaicist at St Mark's, Venice, which is again testimony to the high regard in which Byzantine artists continued to be held in the outside world.¹¹⁵ While in Venice he might well have met his relative George Philanthropenos, passing through on his way to attend the council of Ferrara Florence.¹¹⁶ In other words, Nicholas Philanthropenos had connections with the very highest reaches of the Byzantine aristocracy. If Alexios Apokaukos boasted an equally distinguished surname, he does not seem to have had an aristocratic background. He came into contact with Byzantine high society through the famous preacher Joseph Bryennios, who made him an executor of his will. The best known of the native Cretan icon painters at this time was Angelos Akotantos, but he equally felt the pull of Constantinople. This we know because around the year 1436 he made his will, as he was about to set sail to Constantinople where he was going in search of painting materials.¹¹⁷ This suggests the continuing importance of Constantinople as a point of reference for artists working throughout the Orthodox world, from Russia to the Balkans to the Caucasus and sometimes even further afield. If there are very few illuminated Greek manuscripts surviving from the early fifteenth century, the few there are show no falling off in quality.¹¹⁸ It has to be remembered that a major concern of these years was to preserve the Byzantine heritage. Strenuous efforts were made to restore the illuminations of old manuscripts. We know that one famous illustrated manuscript, the *De materia medica* of Dioskourides, was restored and rebound at this time thanks to John Chortasmenos.¹¹⁹ Generally speaking, it was a period when there was a great deal of copying of manuscripts. It may well be that the preservation of texts rather than the creation of sumptuous illuminated manuscripts was the order of the day.

In its last phase Byzantium was more than ever open to Latin influence, as the few examples of Byzantine art and architecture surviving from the period 1402–53 testify. Much of the architecture comes from Mistra, the Byzantine capital of the Peloponnese,¹²⁰ where a number of buildings have survived from the early fifteenth century. The most impressive is the northern range of the 'palace of despots'. A throne room of imposing proportions ran the length and breadth of the second floor. The abundance of Western features, such as the decoration of the large windows of the throne room and an upper row of circular windows, points to the employment of Italian masons. Western decorative features were also used on the exterior of the one major church built at this time at Mistra: the *katholikon* of the Pantanassa monastery, founded in 1428 by John Phrangopoulos, a court dignitary. By way of contrast, the

planning and iconography of the church were entirely traditional. They follow the model of an earlier monastic church at Mistra, the Hodegetria. Purists complain about the eclecticism of the style and composition of the Pantanassa frescoes, but it seems to be more a matter of an ability to innovate within the strict parameters imposed by the rules of iconography, something that was typically Byzantine. They show a greater sense of movement and realism than is usually found in Byzantine art, which owed something to Italian influence. One of the most memorable scenes depicted in the Pantanassa is the entry into Jerusalem, where the rendering of architecture and townscape is reminiscent of contemporary Siennese painting. Doula Mouriki believed that this compromised the transcendental character of Byzantine painting by transposing action into an illusionistic world.¹²¹ She went on to argue that 'these frescoes already represent an end in the evolution of Byzantine painting, since they no longer function as images carrying with them the eternal truths of Orthodoxy'. It is a neat solution: the Pantanassa is the last major monument of Byzantine art and the end of a tradition. It fits with a view that as a civilisation Byzantium was already in a state of disintegration. Doula Mouriki goes on to imply that there had been a retreat into fantasy: 'The dream world of the Pantanassa demonstrates a lack of anxiety concerning the imminent collapse of the Byzantine world, which can be seen to correspond to Plethon's ideology that promoted a return to the Olympian deities.' Was the creativity, which Gervase Mathew detected in these same frescoes, therefore no more than the death throes of a civilisation,¹²² or was it evidence of a tradition renewing itself? There is a contradiction here, which is more apparent than real. It was a function of a struggle for survival, which intensified a desire to preserve the essentials of Byzantine civilisation. This found expression in the collection and copying of manuscripts and helped to shape an attitude of mind which was intolerant of innovations and foreign influences. But survival equally required the exploration of other possibilities, now that splendid isolation was a luxury in which the Byzantines could no longer afford to indulge. The combination of clinging to an imperial past and exposure to the outside world goes a long way towards explaining the undoubted vitality and achievements of Byzantine culture in its last phase. But, as the controversy between Plethon and Scholarios revealed, it left Byzantines with a problem of identity. Their claim to be Romans had become increasingly unrealistic, but what did it mean to be a Hellene? Such uncertainties left Byzantine society very vulnerable. At the moment of its extinction it was still negotiating the final transition from failed Empire to city-state.

There is no denying the extent of Byzantium's cultural achievements in its final phase, but it was the work of a small elite which had ceased to dominate

a larger society. It had the greatest difficulty in counteracting the drift towards assimilation by the Ottomans. It was at its most insidious among the general population, but members of the elite were far from being immune. The Burgundian traveller Bertrandon de la Broquière noted that the equestrian games played by Byzantine aristocrats were Turkish in origin.¹²³ However, it went deeper than this. While the Turks seem to have been more or less impervious to the attractions of contemporary Byzantine culture, they were respectful of Christian holy men and monasteries and of local religious practices and pilgrimages. The monasteries of Mount Athos, for example, came under Ottoman protection from the mid-fourteenth century.¹²⁴ The tone was set by the dervish orders, which were in the vanguard of Ottoman expansion from Anatolia into the Balkans. Their tolerance of many features of popular Christianity made conversion to Islam relatively painless.¹²⁵ In his *Dialogue with a Persian* Manuel II had tried to warn against the dangers of conversion to Islam, a warning repeated by others in the years after 1402, but polemical writings against Islam had little impact, because no effort was made to combat Islam on the ground.¹²⁶ To judge by the exchange that took place at Nicaea in 1354 between Gregory Palamas and a Muslim sheikh, the argument for Christianity was all but lost among Greeks under Ottoman rule. Gregory's contention that the Christian God was the supreme judge cut very little ice with his audience, which included new converts to Islam. More to its taste was the sheikh's demonstration that the message of Islam supplemented rather than contradicted that of Christianity.¹²⁷ In Asia Minor local bishops either deserted their flocks or were content to cooperate with the Ottoman leaders as a way of saving their skins. This pattern was repeated once the Ottomans embarked on the conquest of Thrace.¹²⁸ The local Christian communities received little support from the patriarchate in Constantinople. There was no mission to the Orthodox under Turkish domination, comparable with that of Joseph Bryennios to the Cretans under Venetian rule. Left to their own devices, Greeks accepted the Islam of the dervish preachers, which offered lay piety of a kind which was missing in Orthodoxy. It catered to the spiritual needs previously met by so-called Bogomil preachers and their likes, who were misrepresented and systematically repressed by the Orthodox Church.¹²⁹ The continuing advance of Islam in the southern Balkans meant that (outside the Peloponnese, the islands and parts of mainland Greece) Orthodoxy lost its hold over the rural population and increasingly found a refuge in the cities.

This serves as a reminder that the underlying situation did not change in the aftermath of the Ottoman defeat in 1402. The revival engineered by Manuel II was impressive. It ensured that Byzantium was in a much healthier

position than it had been since the civil wars of the mid-fourteenth century. If with the advantage of hindsight it looks as though its existence increasingly depended on Ottoman sufferance, at the time Ottoman rulers had cause to fear the Byzantine emperor, because of his apparent ability to organise alliances against them and to make clever use of pretenders. It gave the Byzantine Empire a breathing space in which to recover some of the prestige it had lost in the previous century. It also made all the difference to the legacy that Byzantium left behind. The revival of scholarship and education under the aegis of Manuel II contributed enormously to the preservation and the transmission to the West of classical texts. Less dramatically, it allowed the continuing assimilation of political Orthodoxy by the Russians of Moscow, for whom the Byzantine model had recovered some of its credibility. At a different level, Greeks were able to work out a way of coexisting with the Ottoman regime, while at the same time preserving elements of the Orthodox tradition. If Constantinople had fallen at the end of the fourteenth century, the chances are that the Orthodox populations of the Balkans would have been totally absorbed into Turkish society, in the way that happened in Western Anatolia. As it was, there was to be *Byzance après Byzance*. It was an interesting survival, but it did not count for very much. It had none of the vitality that characterised Byzantine civilisation down to the bitter end.

Notes

- 1 See J. Harris, *The End of Byzantium* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010) for a detailed account of the period from 1402 to 1453.
- 2 D.J. Kastritsis, *The Sons of Bayezid: Empire Building and Representation in the Ottoman Civil War of 1402–13* [Ottoman Empire and its Heritage, 38] (Leiden: Brill, 2007).
- 3 G. Dennis, 'The Byzantine–Turkish Treaty of 1403', *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, 33 (1967), 72–88.
- 4 See J.W. Barker, *Manuel II Palaeologus (1391–1425): A Study in Late Byzantine Statesmanship* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1969).
- 5 See Djurić, *Crépuscule*.
- 6 A. Bryer and H. Lowry, *Continuity and Change in Late Byzantine and Early Ottoman Society* (Birmingham and Washington, DC: University of Birmingham and Dumbarton Oaks, 1986), 281–321.
- 7 K. Fleet, *European and Islamic Trade in the Early Ottoman State: The Merchants of Genoa and Turkey* [Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization] (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), esp. 134–41.

- 8 F. Thiriet, *La Romanie vénitienne au moyen âge: le développement et l'exploitation du domaine colonial vénitien XIIe–XVe siècles* [Bibliothèque des Écoles d'Athènes et de Rome, 193] (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1959), 368–9.
- 9 S. Ronchey, 'Malatesta/Palaeologhi: un' alleanza dinastica per rifondare Bisanzio nel quindicesimo secolo', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 93 (2000), 521–67.
- 10 See A.A.M. Bryer, 'Greek and Türkmens: the Pontic exception', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 29 (1975), 113–149; id., 'Greek historians on the Turks: the case of the first Byzantine–Ottoman marriage', in R.H.C. Davis and J.M. Wallace-Hadrill (eds), *The Writing of History in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 471–93.
- 11 Sphrantzes, ed. Maisano, xxiii, 5–7: 83.1–26; transl. Philippides, 50.
- 12 J. Meyendorff, *Byzantium and the Rise of Russia: A Study of Byzantino-Russian Relations in the Fourteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 257–60; J. Fennell, *A History of the Russian Church to 1448* (London: Longman, 1995), 162–88.
- 13 Sphrantzes, ed. Maisano, xxiii, 7: 82.16–24; transl. Philippides, 50.
- 14 S. Syropoulos, *Les 'Mémoires' de Silvestre Syropoulos sur le concile de Florence (1438–1439)*, ed. V. Laurent (Paris: Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1971), 182.12–16.
- 15 See F. Babinger, 'Von Amurath zu Amurath', *Oriens*, 3(1950), 229–65; C. Imber, *The Crusade of Varna, 1443–1445* [Crusade Texts in Translation, 14] (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 35–6.
- 16 Syropoulos, 'Mémoires', 150.25–7.
- 17 J. Gill, *The Council of Florence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959); G. Alberigo, *Christian Unity: The Council of Ferrara/Florence 1438/39–1989* [Bibliotheca Ephemeridum theologicarum Lovaniensium, 97] (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1991).
- 18 M.-H. Blanchet, 'L'Église Byzantine à la suite de l'union de Florence (1439–1445). De la contestation à la scission', *Byzantinische Forschungen*, 29 (2007), 9–123.
- 19 Syropoulos, 'Mémoires', III, 2: 160–2.
- 20 Ibid. 258.5–10.
- 21 C.M. Woodhouse, *Gemistos Plethon: The Last of the Hellenes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 171–88.
- 22 N.G. Wilson, *From Byzantium to Italy: Greek Studies in the Italian Renaissance* (London: Duckworth, 1992), 8–22, 29–31.
- 23 Ibid. 25–7.
- 24 P. Mackendrick, 'A Renaissance Odyssey: the life of Cyriac of Ancona', *Classica et Mediaevalia*, 13 (1952), 131–45; B. Ashmole, 'Cyriac of Ancona', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 45 (1959), 25–41; J. Colin, *Cyriaque d'Ancone: le voyageur, le*

- marchand, l'humaniste* (Paris: Maloine, 1981); *Cyriac of Ancona Later Travels*, ed. E.W. Bodnar and C. Foss (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006).
- 25 Woodhouse, *Gemistos Plethon*, 374–5.
- 26 I.R. Manners, 'Constructing the image of a city: the representation of Constantinople in Christopher Buondelmonti's *Liber Insularum Archipelagi*', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 87 (1997), 72–102.
- 27 Sphrantzes, ed. Maisano, xxxv, 6: 132.4–10; transl. Philippides, 69.
- 28 N.B. Tomadakis, 'Ἰωσήφ Βρυεννίου Δημηγορία περὶ τοῦ τῆς Πόλεως ἀνακτίσματος (1415 μ.Χ.)', *Epeteris Hetaireias Byzantinon Spoudon*, 36 (1968), §10, 9.187–8.
- 29 F. Miklosich and J. Müller, *Acta et diplomata graeca medii aevi sacra et profana* (Vienna: Gerold, 1862), II, 297–9, 303–4.
- 30 Thiriet, *Romanie vénitienne*, 372–439; D.M. Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice: A Study in Diplomatic and Cultural Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 338–80.
- 31 N. Oikonomidès, *Hommes d'affaires grecs et latins à Constantinople (XIIIe–XVe siècles)* (Paris: Librairie J. Vrin, 1979); Fleet, *European and Islamic Trade*; N. Necipoğlu, *Byzantium between the Ottomans and the Latins: Politics and Society in the Late Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 184–234.
- 32 This is a theme of Harris, *End of Byzantium*, 22–45.
- 33 Bryer and Lowry, *Continuity and Change*, 161–215.
- 34 K.-P. Matschke, 'The Notaras family and its Italian connections', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 49 (1995), 59–72; Th. Ganchou, 'Le rachat des Notaras après la chute de Constantinople ou les relations "étrangères" de l'élite Byzantine au XVe siècle', in M. Balard and A. Ducellier (eds), *Migrations et diasporas méditerranéennes (Xe–XVIe siècles)* [Byzantina Sorboniensia, 19] (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2002), 158–67.
- 35 G. Badoer, *Il libro dei conti di Giacomo Badoer*, ed. U. Dorini and T. Bertelè [Nuovo Ramusio, 3] (Rome: Libreria dello Stato, 1956).
- 36 *Ibid.* 356, 417, 715.
- 37 J. Lefort, 'Badoer et la Bithynie', *Travaux et Mémoires*, 14 (2002), 373–84.
- 38 Badoer, 499.
- 39 Badoer, 135, 410, 411, 480.
- 40 Badoer, 29, 108, 135, 148, 153.
- 41 Badoer, 29, 108, 135, 148, 153, 202, 354, 376, 557.
- 42 Cf. Th. Ganchou, 'Giacomo Badoer et kyr Théodôros Batatzès, "chomerchier di pesi" à Constantinople', *Revue des études Byzantines*, 61 (2003), 49–95.
- 43 Miklosich and Müller, *Acta*, II, 463.

- 44 R. Morris, 'The powerful and the poor in tenth-century Byzantium: law and reality', *Past & Present*, 73 (November 1976), 3–27.
- 45 See T. Kiousopoulou, *Βασιλεύς ή οίκονόμος. Πολιτική εξουσία καί ιδεολογία πρίν την άλωση* (Athens: Polis, 2007), 100–16.
- 46 Tomadakis, 'Ιωσήφ Βρυεννίου Δημηγορία', §10, 9.180–4.
- 47 U. Peschlow, 'Die befestigte Residenz von Memerkule', *Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik*, 51(2001), 385–403; N. Asutay, 'Wer erbaute Mermer-Kule?', *Byzantion*, 72 (2002), 270–4.
- 48 N. Asutay-Effenberger, *Die Landmauer von Konstantinopel-Istanbul* [Millennium Studies, 18] (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 134–42.
- 49 Ruy González de Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlan*, ed. F. López Estrada [Nueva colección de libros raros o curiosos, 1] (Madrid: C.S.I.C. Instituto Nicolás Antonio, 1943), 40, 57.
- 50 e.g. the palace of Theodore Metochites, which is likely to have been situated close to his monastery of St Saviour in Chora, which in its turn is not far from the Tekfur Saray: see R. Guiland, 'Le palais de Théodore Métochite', *Revue des études grecques*, 35 (1922), 82–95.
- 51 See Kiousopoulou, *Βασιλεύς ή οίκονόμος*, 58–77.
- 52 Blanchet, *Georges-Gennadios Scholarios*, 383–450.
- 53 e.g. Doukas, ed. Becker, XXXVI, 5–6: 253–7; transl. Magoulas, 205–6.
- 54 Miklosich and Müller, *Acta*, II, 484.
- 55 See E. Schilbach, 'Die Hypotyposis der καθολικοὶ κριταὶ τῶν Ῥωμάτων von Juni 1398 (?)', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 61 (1968), 44–70.
- 56 Miklosich and Müller, *Acta*, II, 495–6.
- 57 Oikonomidès, *Hommes d'affaires*, 104–5.
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CHAPTER 3

The Greek reaction

I

THE immediate aftermath of the fall of Constantinople was a time of desolation for the survivors. A few hundreds, mainly from aristocratic backgrounds and with good contacts with the Genoese and Venetians, managed to escape aboard Italian shipping, which slipped out of the Golden Horn while the Turks were taking possession of the city. But the majority were rounded up and herded off to the slave markets of Edirne, Gallipoli and Bursa. The experience of the scholar Michael Apostoles is instructive, for it deals in the shattering of an illusion. Captured at the fall of Constantinople, he was imprisoned and then released somewhere along the Black Sea coast. He took ship, buoyed up by the vision of his native city in all its splendour, but after a ghastly voyage found himself disembarking on the other side of the Black Sea, where the sight of the local inhabitants – Scythians and Sarmatians, as he calls them – left him in a state of deep depression. He again took ship and again his only hope was the thought of his native city.¹ Arriving there he quickly realised that he could not endure life under the new dispensation and preferred to go into exile. Another returnee found Constantinople in a far more miserable state than he was able to describe.² The Greeks he came across were sullen and quite demoralised. They had little time for Christianity, preferring to believe in the shades of their ancestors and in old wives' tales. Recalcitrant monks roamed the streets in gangs terrorising the survivors. It signified a complete breakdown of the old order. It was also an expression of loss. Not unnaturally, it was the Greeks who felt the fall of Constantinople more deeply than others. Their emotional attachment to Constantinople was overwhelming. Many, if not most, will have had direct experience of the event. How they felt is best conveyed through the despair of the *Laments*, which the fall of the city inspired.³ Its loss left the Byzantines without a homeland. It deprived them of the core of their

identity. It also prompted a final flourish of Byzantine historiography, which at the very least sought to put the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople into perspective and to provide explanations. In doing so the Byzantine historians of the fall revealed all the divisions within Byzantine society which had momentarily been forgotten in the struggle to save Constantinople.

Of these George Sphrantzes was the only one to have lived through the siege.⁴ However, as already noted, he failed to provide an account of events. He fell into the hands of Mehmed II and was lucky to survive the conqueror's systematic elimination of the Byzantine court aristocracy. It may have helped that he seems not to have objected to his son going into Ottoman service and his daughter into the sultan's harem. But his sense of loss was all the greater because his son was executed for plotting against Mehmed II and his daughter died soon afterwards from plague. He found service in the Peloponnese with the Despot Thomas Palaiologos, a brother of the Emperor Constantine, but he did not follow the despot to Italy, when the Turks annexed the Peloponnese in 1460. Instead, he preferred to remain at Corfu, where in 1468 he became a monk. Although his narrative has nothing on the siege itself, he did consider the question of why the city should have fallen. There is an air of incomprehension in much of what he had to say. He could not understand what his master Constantine XI Palaiologos had done wrong. The emperor had led a life of great rectitude:

*Who else had carried out so many fasts or had offered up so many prayers either personally or through priests specially paid by him? Who else had made greater provision for the poor or more undertakings to God for the liberation of Christians from captivity among the Turks? However, it did little for the emperor's reputation, each saying what they wished against him, while God chose to ignore all [his good works] because of what failings I do not know.*⁵

This comes at the end of a sustained passage in which Sphrantzes blamed Christian powers for deserting Byzantium in its hour of need. During the siege the Turks would jeer, 'Even the Serbs are against you', which was an allusion to the fact that there were Serbs serving in the Ottoman forces.⁶ It was to Sphrantzes's way of thinking an irony that the Mamluk sultan gave the Byzantines almost as much help as the papacy; in other words, next to nothing.⁷ The Hungarians had promised aid, but only grudgingly against the cession of Selymbria or Mesembria;⁸ the king of Aragon likewise, but in his case against the cession of the island of Lemnos.⁹ Sphrantzes understood that the root cause of the fall of the city was the Union of Churches agreed at Florence. He was not opposed to union on principle. He even claimed that he would have given one of his eyes for its proper implementation. The trouble

was that it had provided the Ottomans with a pretext to besiege and conquer the city.¹⁰ Sphrantzes's reasoning, as befitted a trusted imperial agent, was entirely political, but this did not make him a Latin sympathiser, as his confession of faith makes plain. His history is very much a personal statement. It is filled with bitterness and despair. All that he had left to cling to was his Orthodox faith. He was deeply worried about the condition of his soul because he felt that the fall of Constantinople was a prelude to the Last Judgement.¹¹ He no doubt reflected the state of mind of many Byzantines of his generation and standing, for whom his memoirs were intended. Although the earliest surviving manuscript only dates from the late sixteenth century, we can be confident that it had a reasonably wide circulation, not least because it provided the basic material for a short chronicle of 1512 covering the history of the Peloponnese from 1423.¹²

The histories of the fall by Doukas and Laonikos Khalkokondyles may have been even better known. There is an early translation of Doukas's history into Italian, while sixteenth-century Greek historians made extensive use of Khalkokondyles. By way of contrast, it is unlikely that knowledge of Michael Kritoboulos's *Life of Mehmed the Conqueror* spread beyond the sultan's library, which held the author's autograph copy. The importance of these Greek histories lay not so much in their circulation, but in the way that they reflect distinctive reactions to the fall of Constantinople. Those by Laonikos Khalkokondyles and Michael Kritoboulos presented the overthrow of the Byzantine Empire as a necessary stage in the establishment of an Ottoman Empire. In historiographical terms Khalkokondyles's *Demonstrations of Histories* is immensely ambitious.¹³ The historian wished to do for the struggle between the Byzantines and the Ottomans what Herodotus had done for the wars between the Greeks and the Persians. Laonikos saw himself as a witness of the latest chapter in the age-old confrontation of East and West. This time the East in the shape of the Ottomans was triumphant, while the West in the shape of the Byzantine Empire was in terminal decline. But it is no straightforward narrative. In the manner of Herodotus he introduces a series of *excursus*, which deal with the lands to the north of the Black Sea, with Germany, Hungary and central Europe, and with Spain. Again following Herodotus he enlivens his narrative with anecdotes. These digressions allow him to place the rise of the Ottoman Empire in a broad historical and geographical framework.¹⁴

It is, however, very difficult to locate Laonikos Khalkokondyles. He was born in Athens around 1423. His family moved to Mistra, where he became a pupil of George Gemistos Plethon. He was still there in 1447, when the antiquarian Ciriaco of Ancona met him in the company of the philosopher.¹⁵ He does not seem to have gone to Italy, unlike his cousin Demetrios

Khalkokondyles, who taught Greek at the University of Padua from 1463 to 1471.¹⁶ Still more surprising is the fact that Laonikos does not feature in the extensive correspondences maintained by Greek scholars after 1453 both in Italy and in the Ottoman territories. If it was not through correspondence that he obtained most of the information for his *Demonstrations of Histories*, then it must have been through direct contact with his informants. We know, for example, that the financial clerks of the Ottoman sultan supplied him with exact details of the Ottoman budget.¹⁷ There are good reasons for believing that he established himself in Constantinople after 1453.¹⁸ His direct reliance on informants is evident towards the end of his history in his account of the fall of Trebizond in 1461, so much so that modern scholars have accused him of plagiarism. It is more than likely that he did not have time to work up the concluding sections of his narrative, which ends abruptly in 1463. It is likely that he was dead before 1470, because he was apparently unaware of the Ottoman conquest of Negroponte in that year.¹⁹

These uncertainties about Khalkokondyles's life are less important to his history than the influence it betrays of the ideas of his master George Gemistos Plethon.²⁰ The latter's hopes for the regeneration of Hellenic civilisation moulded Khalkokondyles spiritually and intellectually. Plethon was convinced that within a few years a new order would triumph which was neither Christian nor Muslim but Hellenic. Khalkokondyles saw his master's ideas exposed as nothing but dreams, but this did not mean that he abandoned them. He believed that in the fullness of time there would be emperors, 'the sons of Hellenes, who would rule over no mean Empire, having revived their ancient customs, from which they would gather great comfort, while others would find them most formidable'.²¹ The fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans was a necessary first step to the creation of a Hellenic Empire. It did not require outpourings of grief, even if Khalkokondyles admitted that it was one of the great catastrophes of world history, approaching in scale the fall of Troy, but he dismissed as a Latin fantasy the idea that it was a way of revenging Troy. There are no vestiges of any Christian explanation for the fall of the city. Instead it was a matter of fortune, but Khalkokondyles does not see fortune as akin to the Christian idea of Divine Providence. In the same way as Plethon he understands fortune as implacable fate, but he adds a new twist.²² Fortune favours the virtuous. Khalkokondyles believed that the Romans were both fortunate and virtuous, while their Byzantine successors had simply ridden their luck. The Ottomans, by way of contrast, were imbued with virtue, by which Khalkokondyles meant military prowess. His history is remarkably sympathetic to the Ottomans, but with one exception. Mehmed II does not emerge well from his narrative. He is presented as a monster of lust

and violence.²³ Unlike George Sphrantzes, whose despair and incomprehension reflected a very general reaction to the fall of Constantinople on the part of his generation of Byzantine aristocrats, Khalkokondyles was speaking for himself. There were not many others who continued to espouse the ideas of George Gemistos Plethon.²⁴ His history is nevertheless eloquent testimony to the richness of Byzantine literary culture in its last phase. It was nurtured by a profound knowledge and understanding of classical authors, though it was only at the bitter end that their ideas would be taken as literally as they were by Plethon and his pupil.

Michael Kritoboulos had an equally good grounding in the classics, but his history was very different from that of Khalkokondyles, even though the focus of both their histories was the creation of the Ottoman Empire.²⁵ Kritoboulos set out to write a history of Mehmed the Conqueror. He dedicated his work to the Ottoman sultan. The one existing manuscript of his history was the work of Mehmed II's Greek scriptorium and was intended as a pendant to a manuscript of Arrian's *Life of Alexander*. Kritoboulos's history was addressed to the sultan; it was not for general circulation, but it does reflect the attitudes of those Greek *archontes* who threw in their lot with the Ottomans. Kritoboulos came from a powerful family based on the island of Imbros. Immediately after the fall of Constantinople he helped to ensure the surrender of Lemnos, Imbros and Thasos to the Ottomans. Kritoboulos's reward was the governorship of Imbros. He proved his loyalty and ability in 1457 by saving Imbros from a papal fleet, which had left Latin garrisons in Lemnos and Thasos. Two years later Kritoboulos was able to recover the island of Lemnos for the Ottomans.

Kritoboulos was not an eyewitness to the siege of Constantinople, but he had good sources on the Ottoman side. He produced an admirably impartial and balanced account. He recognised the historical significance of the fall of the 'most mighty and longest lasting Empire of which we know'.²⁶ He did not believe that the Greek people (*genos*) were to blame. The fault lay with those in power.²⁷ Kritoboulos was singling out Constantine XI and his advisers. His sympathies were with Constantine's brother, the Despot Demetrios Palaiologos, for whom he acted as an intermediary at the Ottoman court. In 1457 he was behind a plan for Demetrios to take over the islands of Lemnos and Imbros in return for an annual tribute of 3,000 ducats.²⁸ In the end, nothing came of this and Demetrios found himself confined to Edirne as a pensioner of Mehmed II. Like Demetrios, Kritoboulos was a collaborator. He consistently refers to Mehmed II as *basileus* or even *meas basileus* and considered that he was a legitimate successor of the Byzantine emperors. For Kritoboulos the fall of Constantinople meant the possibility of the political

reunification of the Greeks under a single ruler, who would act as protector of the Orthodox Church. It is for this reason that the re-establishment of the patriarchate under Gennadios occupies so prominent a place in his history, in contrast to the other contemporary accounts of the fall of Constantinople. He presents it as an essential step in the resuscitation of Constantinople, in which he was confident that the Greeks would play a leading role.

Another theme explored in Kritoboulos's history was the gathering in of the Greek lands under the Ottoman sultan. Mehmed II's annexation of the Peloponnese in 1460 is treated in great detail, as is his conquest of Trebizond in the following year. Kritoboulos notes the role played in the surrender of both Mistra and Trebizond by Mehmed II's Greek secretary, Theodore Katabolenos, who was in all likelihood his informant.²⁹ At the very least, it confirms that Kritoboulos was close to those Greek *archontes* who were high in the sultan's service and favour. Katabolenos will have negotiated the surrender of Trebizond with George Amiroutzes, who was acting for David Komnenos, the last emperor of Trebizond. Amiroutzes was a leading Byzantine scholar and a friend of Kritoboulos.³⁰ He had been one of the Emperor John VIII's personal advisers at the council of Ferrara Florence. His role in the surrender of Trebizond brought its reward when he was taken into Mehmed II's service. He seems to have become the sultan's resident Greek philosopher. Among other things he created a world map based on Ptolemy for Mehmed II. Amiroutzes happened to be a cousin of the chief vezir, Mahmud Pasha. His two sons would convert to Islam and became influential figures at the Ottoman court. The favour enjoyed by Amiroutzes was the cause of envy and suspicion. He was accused of converting to Islam, but the charge was groundless. He was, on the other hand, a quite shameless apologist for the new order, and in the same way as Kritoboulos, he treated Mehmed II as the legitimate heir of the Byzantine *basileus*. Kritoboulos and Amiroutzes were examples of that highly educated laity who for centuries had preserved and elaborated Byzantine civilisation. Now they were working to create a sympathetic image of an infidel ruler. Kritoboulos recorded Mehmed II's visit to Athens in 1458, when the sultan admired the city and the Hellenic sites round about. A marginal note by the author himself described Mehmed II as a Philhellene.³¹ Kritoboulos observed that the sultan's deeds were 'in no way inferior to those of Alexander the Macedonian' and deserved to be celebrated in Greek, just as much as in Arabic or Persian.³² It is an example of a conquered people seeking to appropriate the conqueror for its own purposes. Kritoboulos did this in a highly sophisticated way. The influence of Thucydides is clear, but more subtle is that of Josephus, whose *Jewish War* offered the perfect example of the advantages that a conquered people might derive from collaboration with

the conqueror. Kritoboulos presented the most optimistic and perhaps for the moment the most realistic assessment of the fall of Constantinople. He was suggesting that the essentials of a Byzantine identity could be preserved. All it needed was to accept an infidel ruler as the protector of Orthodoxy.

A diametrically opposed interpretation came from the historian Doukas, who could only see it as unmitigated tragedy brought on by the Byzantines themselves.³³ He was not an eyewitness of the siege, but he was able, as we know, to talk to many of the participants. He was a frequent visitor to the Ottoman court on missions carried out on behalf of his employers, the Gattilusio lords of Mitylene. He came from a distinguished Byzantine family, which had gone into exile in the middle of the fourteenth century and had found service with the emirs of Aydin. Somehow he managed to obtain a reasonably good Greek education, and became secretary to the Genoese governor of New Phokaia, before moving into the service of the Gattilusi. Doukas belonged to that Levantine society which had come into being in the Latin territories of the Aegean and eastern Mediterranean. Though Orthodox he was a convinced unionist, which gives his history a very different perspective from the other Byzantine historians of the fall. We have to deduce his reasons for writing his history from the one passage where he commented obliquely on its aims. He considered that it was not 'proper for him to continue writing the history of what followed the fall of the city, for it is not fitting to chronicle the victories and achievements of an infidel ruler and sworn enemy and destroyer of our race (*genos*)'.³⁴ This suggests quite strongly that it was the fall of Constantinople which prompted his history. Once he had carried his story to this point, he was left with the dilemma of whether to continue it or not. He explains why he decided to do so: in his youth he had heard a prophecy that, just as Osman, the founder of the Ottoman dynasty, was a contemporary of the first Palaiologan emperor, so its downfall would coincide with that of the Palaiologoi. These were the slenderest of hopes, which he will have been pinning on the plans there were in the West for a crusade to recover Constantinople. Doukas introduces us to the world of the Byzantine *diaspora*, which felt the loss of Constantinople as keenly as any of its citizens. Of the Byzantine historians of the fall only Doukas left a lament on the fall of city, which forms the climax of his history.³⁵ It conveys a sense of loss that is entirely absent from the histories of Kritoboulos and Khalkokondyles. Like other unionists, Doukas did not believe that his unionism made him any the less a pious Orthodox. He may well have been trying to express the grief of his primary audience, the Orthodox community of Mitylene, which in the aftermath of the council of Ferrara Florence had followed its archbishop in his support for the Union of Churches.³⁶ Just as

Kritoboulos understood that an Ottoman conquest of Constantinople made possible the political reunification of the Orthodox community, so Doukas, less realistically, hoped that the Union of Churches would usher in a period of sustained recovery for Byzantium and, at a personal level, would allow him to return to his lost fatherland. He singled out as the underlying cause of the fall of Constantinople the failure to implement the Union of Florence until it was too late.

It was not a view that was shared by many Greeks. His history reflects one, rather weak, strand of Byzantine opinion, but it does emphasise how divided this was on the eve of the fall of Constantinople. In the same way as the other historians, Doukas was wrestling with the question of what now happened to Byzantine identity. He was not able to give any satisfactory answer. Sphrantzes was left with his personal faith. Khalkokondyles considered Byzantine identity an irrelevance, because it had never suited the genius of the Hellenes. He was left to dream of its regeneration under Hellenic rulers. It was only Kritoboulos who offered any practical solutions, almost certainly because he was in touch with those who had the painful task of rebuilding a Greek society after 1453.

II

This had as its starting point the re-establishment of the patriarchate of Constantinople. Of contemporary historians it is Kritoboulos who has left the most detailed account of this fateful event. He not only understood its importance, but he was also close to the new Patriarch Gennadios II, who in his earlier incarnation as George Scholarios had almost certainly been his teacher.³⁷ Kritoboulos was likely to have been acquainted with those Greek *archontes* in Ottoman service who persuaded Mehmed II that the restoration of the patriarchate was the essential step to take, if the Greeks were to be reconciled to their fate. At their head was the *Krites* Nicholas Isidoros. The chance survival of a cache of his letters dating from July to December 1453 reveals something of the range of his activities in the immediate aftermath of the fall of Constantinople.³⁸ He was *megas emin* of the Great Lord, which indicates that he was among the sultan's most trusted personal agents. His other title of *krites* must refer to his position at the head of the Christian community at Edirne. But his interests encompassed most of Rumeli, as the Ottoman territories in the southern Balkans were known. On the Black Sea coast he farmed salt pans near Mesembria,³⁹ while beyond Thessaloniki his agents raised taxes around Kitros.⁴⁰ The archbishop of Thessaloniki had to explain to him his reasons for failing to celebrate the feast of St Demetrios

on the correct day.⁴¹ The clergy of the church of Gallipoli turned to him for help in ransoming prisoners taken at the sack of Constantinople.⁴² He himself was active in ransoming prisoners at this time. Greeks from all over Rumeli brought their troubles to him. Nicholas Isidoros made it his business to know what was happening in the different Greek communities and brought his influence to bear accordingly. It therefore comes as no surprise to find him involved during the autumn of 1453 in the earliest stages of the re-establishment of the patriarchate of Constantinople, when George Scholarios, the future patriarch Gennadios II, was restoring a monastery in Constantinople. Scholarios was proposing to have Nicholas Isidoros commemorated in the prayers of the monastery, presumably in return for his support. The latter wanted concrete confirmation that this was going ahead and left instructions for the *Didaskalos* Scholarios to this effect.⁴³ This exchange makes it very probable that Nicholas Isidoros was one of the Greek *archontes* who had alerted Mehmed II to the whereabouts of George Scholarios in the aftermath of the sack of Constantinople and pressed his claims to become patriarch. This might be a certainty, if a postscript to a letter sent on 18 October 1453 to Nicholas Isidoros by one of his servants referred to Scholarios. It simply confirmed that the saintly *didaskalos* had received his official instructions.⁴⁴ The word used for these is *pittakion*, which suggests a document emanating from the sultan's Greek chancery, or even letters of appointment in the shape of a *berat*.

On 6 January 1454 George Scholarios ascended the patriarchal throne as Gennadios II.⁴⁵ He insisted that the ceremony observed all the traditional conventions and that the re-establishment of the patriarchate was an act of God. He had nothing to say about the sultan's role, which was crucial, even if he was not necessarily present at the patriarch's enthronement. Although it has not survived, Gennadios must have received, in the same way as his successors, a *berat* from the sultan, which were letters of appointment, setting out the privileges and responsibilities that went with the office. It was a way of emphasising that it was a personal appointment made by the sultan; not the recognition of the patriarchate as an independent institution. In other words, the patriarch's election by synod was a purely formal approval of the sultan's personal choice. Under the new dispensation patriarchs were beholden to the sultan in a way they never had been to the Byzantine emperor. But Mehmed II had every reason to be generous. It was vital to have order restored within Constantinople. The situation which confronted the Patriarch Gennadios on his return to the city in the autumn of 1453 was one of near anarchy. Constantinople was infested with scavengers and looters, while bands of mutinous monks roamed the streets. Dealing with such a situation

was a massive task, which required all the help that Gennadios could muster. Even before setting off for Constantinople in the early autumn of 1453 he was in touch by letter with members of the *Synaxis*, the group opposed to the Union of Churches.⁴⁶ One of them was Theodore Agallianos, who held the position of *hieromnemon* of the Patriarchal Church.⁴⁷ He was being held captive at Bursa, but he reached Constantinople around the same time as the soon-to-be patriarch, whom he would serve with great devotion.

The sultan assigned Gennadios the Church of the Holy Apostles as the new seat of the patriarchate. It was here that his installation as patriarch took place. It was suitably grand, the largest church in Constantinople after St Sophia, and situated at the centre of the city. But Gennadios soon had to give it up. According to a later tradition this was because of the hostility of the local population, which was largely Muslim. It may not have been a coincidence that Mehmed II stepped in almost immediately and expropriated the church. He had it pulled down and built in its place his own mosque, the Fatih Camii. It looks as though the sultan was beginning to think better of his initial generosity to the Orthodox Church. He was under pressure to put a distinctively Muslim stamp on his new capital. Gennadios received the church of St Mary Pammakaristos instead. Pretty as it is, it was minute by comparison with the Holy Apostles. It is situated on the slopes leading down to the Golden Horn, far from the centre of the city. The intention was clearly to diminish the presence of the Orthodox Church. It also had the effect – intended or otherwise – of concentrating the Greek population of the city in the area around the new patriarchal church.⁴⁸

Gennadios understood that his main task was pastoral. The Greeks were in total disarray. While numbers of them stayed on in Constantinople after the sack of the city, surviving as best they could, many, perhaps the majority, were driven away into captivity. In a way that never happened after 1204, when the crusaders took the city, continuity at a local level snapped. Most of those redeemed from captivity made their way back to Constantinople, but found it more or less impossible to take up the threads of their former life. There was a serious danger of mass defection to Islam, such was the disillusionment of the survivors. Gennadios had to find ways of strengthening the Orthodox in their faith. In the first place, he needed to explain both the significance of the fall of Constantinople and the place of the Orthodox community in a new dispensation. He understood that the fall of Constantinople was a punishment for sins, specifically for the Union of Churches, which was a betrayal of Orthodoxy. God had withheld His wrath and in His mercy had provided many opportunities for repentance, but these had not been taken. The fall of the city provided an opportunity for the Church to purify itself.

Conditions were propitious. They were returning to the state of affairs that existed before the Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity. It was a return to the age of the martyrs. The patriarch pointed to examples of new martyrs, who had suffered death rather than accept Islam, as proof that a new spirit was beginning to permeate Orthodoxy. But overshadowing this was Gennadios's conviction that the Last Judgement was imminent. He presented himself as a prophet, who had long foreseen such a possibility, and had the responsibility of preparing his flock for the ultimate test. Theodore Agallianos compared his friend to Moses, who was leading his people out of exile and into the Promised Land.⁴⁹

For some reason Gennadios never paid specific attention after the fall of the city to the question of the Union of Churches. It is most likely that he considered that it had now become an irrelevance. A more pressing concern was the neo-paganism of George Gemistos Plethon and his followers. Plethon died on 26 June 1452. He left behind, as a testament to his religious beliefs, his *Book of Laws*, which combined Neoplatonic theology with a pagan liturgy.⁵⁰ After his death a copy fell into the hands of the Despot Demetrios Palaiologos, who forwarded it to the future patriarch. But as yet without any proper authority Gennadios returned it to the despot. Once patriarch he retrieved the copy and had it ceremonially burnt, although he preserved the contents page and some of the hymns to the Olympian Gods, as proof of its blasphemous character.⁵¹ It has always seemed a peculiarly vindictive action, but what else could Gennadios have done? His standing as patriarch depended very largely on his intellectual prestige, which Plethon had called in question during their controversy over the relative merits of Plato and Aristotle. Condemnation of Plethon's *Book of Laws* justified the stance which Gennadios had then taken. At a time when the Orthodox Church was bitterly divided over the Union of Churches, to have one of the leading scholars of the day denying that Christianity was the true faith was deeply undermining. Realistically, it could only work to the advantage of Islam. Gennadios's action against Plethon's legacy has to be seen as a part of an attempt to strengthen the foundations of Orthodoxy. This took its most palpable form in his exposition of the Christian faith in meetings with Muslim scholars under the aegis of the sultan himself at the patriarchal church of St Mary Pammakaristos. He set out with great precision the central tenet of Christianity: that salvation is only possible through the one God acting as a Trinity. In itself, defending Christian doctrine before the sultan was a demonstration of the acceptance of Christianity by the new regime. The patriarch was under no illusion that his words would make any impact on Mehmed II. His intention was to use such an occasion to strengthen the Orthodox in their belief.⁵²

At first sight burning Plethon's *Book of Laws* and providing the sultan with an exposition of the Christian faith hardly amount to much, but this is to forget how brittle Orthodoxy was in the aftermath of the fall of Constantinople. There were conversions to Islam, including one bishop. In the face of the danger of many more, Gennadios was demonstrating that Orthodoxy was still valid and had an important place in the new dispensation. His experiences in the autumn of 1453, when he had to confront the full force of the disillusionment and resentments of the Greeks left behind in Constantinople, convinced him that a disciplinarian approach to restoring ecclesiastical order would be self-defeating. This was clearest in his treatment of marriage problems. Marriage was the area where canon law impinged most directly on family structure. A catastrophe such as the fall of Constantinople, split up families, which had the gravest consequences for social stability and even threatened the continued existence of the Orthodox community. It deprived the individual of accustomed support and made conversion to Islam that much easier. Spouses were separated and lost touch. They contracted new marriages or made other arrangements. Should they wish to regularise their new unions they found themselves up against the full rigour of canon law. Conversion to Islam often seemed a far more practical and humane alternative. It was immediately apparent to Gennadios that to insist on applying the letter of the law was a recipe for further conversions to Islam. He therefore preferred a policy of leniency or *oikonomia*, as it is often labelled in an Orthodox context. Ensuring that those returning from captivity were brought safely into the fold of the Orthodox Church was probably the most practical means of rebuilding a community around the patriarchate, but it brought down on Gennadios and his loyal lieutenant Theodore Agallianos the hostility of an influential section of the patriarchal synod, which argued for the full implementation of the law.⁵³ It is impossible to tell how far this was a matter of self-interest, for the politics of Gennadios's patriarchate are extremely murky and establishing the different currents that played around the patriarch is very largely a matter of guesswork, but by the autumn of 1454 Gennadios had had enough and was threatening to resign his office. His temperament may have had a part to play. There is the ring of truth about Plethon's description of him as 'a man divided within himself'.⁵⁴ He was both overweening and lacking in confidence and he was never a politician. The task facing him was daunting enough. He found criticism unendurable. His threat of resignation may also have been a protest against interference in ecclesiastical affairs by Greek *archontes* with influence at the Ottoman court. Slightly later developments show that they considered that the re-establishment of the patriarchate had been their work and that they should have a decisive voice in its decisions and organisation.⁵⁵

Gennadios finally resigned at the very beginning of 1456. The exact circumstances are unclear, but he claimed to be happy to depart. He had been patriarch for just two years. His successor was an ally named Isidore, who had also been a member of *Synaxis* before 1453. Isidore died in 1462 and was followed by another member of the group, the historian Silvester Syropoulos, who took the name Sophronios. It was only after the latter's death in 1464 that orderly succession to the patriarchal throne broke down. All the time Gennadios remained an influential figure in the background. After his departure he retreated to the Athonite monastery of Vatopedi, but stayed for less than a year before finding a permanent place of retirement just outside the city of Serres in the monastery of the Forerunner on Mount Menoikeion. He recovered the trust of Mehmed II, who recalled him to Constantinople on two occasions to advise on the affairs of the Orthodox Church. He took up residence in the patriarchal church, but this does not mean, as was once thought, that he was reinstated as patriarch.⁵⁶ His second and last stay in Constantinople was in 1464, but thereafter his influence seems to have been in decline and he was unable to prevent the patriarchal throne becoming a prize open to the highest bidder. This became a permanent feature of the Orthodox Church under the Ottomans. The sultans were happy to exploit for gain the internal rivalries within the Church. Gennadios was hardly to blame, but it has always cast a shadow over his restoration of the patriarchate. Paradoxically, it was proof that Gennadios had done his work only too well. He (with help from his immediate successors as patriarch) had ensured the viability of the Orthodox Church. That accomplished, the patriarchate could now be incorporated as an important element in the Ottoman machinery of government. Its main function was to oversee the internal affairs of the Orthodox communities under Ottoman rule. But there was a price to be paid to the sultan for this delegation of authority. It was similar to the experience of other Christian Churches under Muslim domination.⁵⁷

On the face of it, once the patriarchate had been restored, ecclesiastical arrangements should have remained much as they were before 1453. Prelates prominent in the affairs of the patriarchate before the city fell, men such as Theodore Agallianos and Silvester Syropoulos, continued to be so thereafter. There should even have been some improvements in the Church's position, given that so many Orthodox now came under Ottoman rule. Practically speaking, the disappearance of the Byzantine emperor should not have made a decisive difference. The Ottoman sultan might be expected to act as protector of the material interests of the patriarchate. Gennadios was sceptical about this, but admitted that it was thanks to the magnanimity of the sultan that not only was the loss of life during the sack of Constantinople not worse

than it was, but the restoration of the patriarchate also became possible. However, he fully realised the enormity of the changes which followed the fall of the city. Despite physical appearances Constantinople was gone forever. It was no longer the Constantinople that Gennadios had known, when by his own account he had been an ornament at the court of the Emperor John VIII Palaiologos. It was a recognition that Constantinople had been more than bricks and mortar. It had been the symbol of a world-view, at the centre of which was the notion of Christian Empire. Bereft of this carapace the Orthodox Church needed to find a new sense of purpose. The loss of St Sophia as the patriarchal church only confirmed the fall from Grace. Gennadios understood that the survivors of the conquest of Constantinople had become exiles in what had been their homeland. They had to seek it elsewhere, 'which is where our city now is', by which Gennadios meant the Heavenly City. He was full of nostalgia for his life before the fall, but what is striking is his conviction that Byzantium could never be resurrected. This is in contrast with what happened after 1204, when there was a determination to rebuild the Empire, even if it was in exile. Gennadios reflected a general acceptance on the part of Greeks that the Ottomans represented a new dispensation, but not one likely to endure, since it was only part of the preparation for the Last Judgement. Given the long tradition of millenarianism at Byzantium, it was an easy way of coming to terms with a cataclysmic event, for the fall of Constantinople turned out to be the end of one world.⁵⁸ It also spelt the destruction of an identity.

The survivors looked to Gennadios for guidance. He assured them that, if first and foremost they were Christians, they were also Hellenes. From the twelfth century Hellene might be used as an equivalent for *Romaïos* or Roman, which was the normal term for what we would call a Byzantine, but it was done with some diffidence, because the usual meaning of Hellene was pagan. It remained a usage confined to scholars, who found it a convenient way of suggesting an intellectual dimension to Byzantine identity. *Romaïos* was a term which Gennadios deliberately avoided. The most likely explanation for this is that it was synonymous with the Byzantine past. But, having cast himself in the role of prophet, he needed a people to lead. Using the term Hellene was a convenient way of underlining the break with the Byzantine past, but it had to be purged of its pagan connotations, which Plethon's project for a Hellenic revival had only enhanced. This may explain the underlying bitterness of Gennadios's controversy with Plethon. The identification of Hellene and Christian provided the basis for a new Greek identity after the fall of Constantinople. It was Gennadios who was the first to articulate this. It does not quite mean that he created a new identity for the Greeks, for in

some ways it was a spontaneous development. With the loss of Empire and capital, all that was left as the basis of a new identity was faith and a sense of group solidarity, or *genos*, as it would be termed. Hellene had the advantage of inclusivity. It brought together the scattered Greek communities, who were being reunited under Ottoman rule. In the long term, it helped that this usage had the *imprimatur* of the Patriarch Gennadios. If his reputation was in decline in the years immediately after his death, it recovered in the early sixteenth century. He was portrayed in the histories of the patriarchate written a few years later as a heroic figure responsible for preserving the integrity of the Orthodox Church.⁵⁹ It helped that the corpus of his writings, unlike those of any of his contemporaries, survived intact, and that some of his more important works went into print early on.

Gennadios's writings provided one of the main bridges spanning the chasm which separated Byzantium from the *Tourkokratia*, as the new dispensation is sometimes called. His legacy was of critical importance to the intellectual life of the Orthodox Church after 1453. Until recently it has been fashionable to disparage his contribution. He is often blamed for the ossification of Greek intellectual life after 1453, but without him all that would have remained was a narrow monastic culture. The problem has always been that Gennadios's interest in Thomas Aquinas and scholastic thought has seemed to go against the grain of Orthodox tradition. As a result, he has often been condemned as an obscurantist, but this is neither fair nor realistic. Gennadios brought to completion the major intellectual achievement of late Byzantine scholars, which was the reconciliation of the mystical theology of Gregory Palamas and the new Aristotelianism inspired by the discovery of the work of Thomas Aquinas.⁶⁰ He, more than anybody, was responsible for its transmission. It provided a respectable and solid intellectual foundation for the Orthodox Church under Turkish rule, as the exchanges of ideas and doctrines with Lutheran divines in the later sixteenth century showed.⁶¹ However, these also revealed how narrowly based intellectual life at Constantinople had become.

A major casualty of the fall of Constantinople was education. To the bitter end Byzantium had preserved its proud educational tradition. It meant that those responsible for restoring the patriarchate were men of considerable intellectual attainments; Gennadios obviously so, but also Theodore Agallianos and the Patriarch Sophronios (1462–64), who as Silvester Syropoulos wrote an account of the council of Ferrara Florence which ranks among the most accomplished historical works produced by a Byzantine. Add to their number men such as George Amiroutzes, Michael Kritoboulos, and another historian, Laonikos Khalkokondyles,⁶² who were working in Constantinople after 1453, and it would seem that there was a nucleus of scholars and teachers more than

capable of handing on Byzantium's educational and intellectual tradition. The existence of sixteenth-century catalogues reveals that the patriarchate also managed to preserve libraries. Their holdings were mainly patristic and theological but there was a smattering of classical authors and even a Byzantine romance.⁶³ Later sources credit Gennadios with the establishment of a patriarchal school, but it is more likely to have been a matter of private lessons offered by officials of the Great Church, such as the Grand Rhetor Matthew Kamariotes, who produced a rather basic textbook of rhetoric.⁶⁴ Thereafter, the standard declined even further, which explains why Byzantine literary culture just petered out in the years after 1453.

A high proportion of the well educated preferred to seek their fortunes in Italy, but this is only a partial explanation of the collapse of Byzantine education. The real reason was that it was no longer necessary. The Greek *archontes* in Ottoman service were literate, as transpires both from the letters of Nicholas Isidoros and from the treaties drawn up in Greek between the Ottomans and foreign powers. But these were in a workaday Greek. There are none of the refinements you might expect from a highly educated Byzantine. After 1453 all that was necessary was a fairly basic level of literacy. There was no longer an imperial court, while the patriarchal establishment was on a much reduced scale. The most insidious threat came, however, from a different direction. Scions of aristocratic Byzantine families opted for conversion and entry into Ottoman service. The sons of George Amiroutzes, to take one example, converted to Islam and enjoyed highly successful careers. This process started long before 1453 and appears to have been a response by the Byzantine aristocracy to the growing power of the Ottomans. It obviously helped to have a member of the family in a position of influence at the Ottoman court. The best example was Mehmed II's longest serving Grand Vezir Mahmud Pasha. He came from a branch of the Philanthropenos family, which had settled in Serbia. He had connections throughout the Byzantine world, which he maintained.⁶⁵ George Amiroutzes from Trebizond, as we have seen, was a cousin. Mahmud Pasha was a man of great sophistication. He was a major patron of Ottoman art and architecture and an accomplished poet, but in Turkish and Persian. At least two more of Mehmed II's Grand Vezirs came from a Byzantine aristocratic background. One of these was Gedik Ahmed Pasha, who was supposed to descend from the imperial house of Palaiologos. It was part of the way that the remnants of a Byzantine elite were absorbed into the Ottoman system. The most basic reason why Byzantine civilisation could not survive the fall of Constantinople was that it was an elite culture. All that remained of the Byzantine elite after 1453 were a number of ecclesiastics attached to the patriarchal church.

There was another elite, which was untouched by the fall of Constantinople. This was the monastic elite, which gravitated to Mount Athos. The monasteries of Mount Athos had come under unofficial Ottoman protection from the late fourteenth century. This was formalised in 1424, when they accepted Ottoman overlordship rather than pass under Venetian control. Mount Athos prospered under Ottoman auspices, becoming more than ever the focus of international Orthodoxy. Bulgarians, Serbs, Vlachs, Georgians and Russians all had a presence there. It was a microcosm of the so-called Byzantine Commonwealth, which ensured a degree of detachment from the fate of Constantinople.⁶⁶ Using the figures given by the Russian monk Isaiah as a rough and ready guide, it would seem that the Greeks were already in a minority on the Holy Mountain by the late fifteenth century, even if the two largest and most prestigious monasteries, the Lavra and Vatopedi, remained in their hands.⁶⁷ Relations with the patriarchate of Constantinople were close in the second half of the fourteenth century, when there was a succession of Athonite monks on the patriarchal throne, but this was no longer the case in the years before 1453. Mount Athos did send the abbots of the Lavra and Vatopedi as representatives to the council of Ferrara Florence, but this was at the invitation of the emperor. The abbot of the Athonite monastery of St Paul's was also part of the Orthodox delegation to the council, but not as a representative of Mount Athos. He became a convinced unionist. Promoted after the council to a metropolitan see, he went on diplomatic missions to the West on behalf of John VIII Palaiologos. He did not return to the Holy Mountain, where the union was deeply unpopular among the monks.⁶⁸ Distaste for the union might explain why the fall of Constantinople seems to have elicited no comment from the leaders of Mount Athos, but neither did the re-establishment of the patriarchate under Gennadios, which is perhaps more surprising. In fact, contact between Athos and the patriarchate of Constantinople – despite Gennadios's brief stay at the monastery of Vatopedi – was minimal until 1498, when the *Protos* (or president) of Mount Athos sought the help of the Patriarch Joachim I in disciplining the monks.⁶⁹

Monasticism was vital to Byzantine civilisation. It offered an alternative way of life, an escape or retreat from the burdens of a secular existence, which many took. It was always a major focus of lay piety and generosity. Monasteries were often fabulously wealthy. Though monasteries might offer security to great scholars, and though they often boasted rich libraries, scholarship and education were not their main purpose. Their function was rather prayer and preparing the path to salvation, which the monks of Mount Athos took very seriously. The triumph of hesychasm in the fourteenth century restricted the place of secular learning on the Holy Mountain. The Florentine priest

Cristoforo Buondelmonti, who visited it shortly before 1420, was immensely impressed by the numbers and piety of its monks.⁷⁰ The antiquarian Ciriaco of Ancona was there in November 1444. If he found the buildings of the monasteries of the Lavra and Vatopedi impressive, it was the monastic libraries that excited him. He noted a very old copy of the *Iliad* in the library at Vatopedi and at Philotheou he came across Eustathios of Thessaloniki's commentaries on the *Iliad*. But best of all at the monastery of Iveron he was able to purchase a copy of Plutarch's *Moralia*, while the abbot was away on a mission to the Ottoman court.⁷¹ The wealth of the Athonite libraries was well known. During the preparations for departure to Italy in 1438 the Byzantine Emperor John VIII Palaiologos sent to Athos for volumes not available at Constantinople, which were needed for the forthcoming council.⁷² Both materially and spiritually Mount Athos was the one Byzantine success story of the declining years of the Empire, but this was at the cost of detaching itself from the fate of Byzantium by accepting Ottoman protection. It meant that an integral element of Byzantine civilisation survived more or less intact. But the lack of engagement with higher education made itself felt. When Pierre Belon visited Athos in 1546 he noted the remnants of once great libraries. His observations are instructive:

*One used to find Greek manuscripts on the aforesaid mountain, because the Greek monks were in the past far more learned than they are at present. Now monks who have any learning are rare. It would be impossible to find more than a single educated monk in each monastery. Anybody looking for theological manuscripts has a good chance of finding them, but not works of poetry, history, or philosophy.*⁷³

Monasticism did its best to adapt to the new conditions created by the disappearance of Byzantium, but found it difficult to maintain any level of intellectual activity now that there was no longer that core of highly educated functionaries who were the true bearers of Byzantine civilisation.

The gradual absorption of Mount Athos into the Ottoman system predated the fall of Constantinople. This puts a different complexion on the demise of Byzantium, which ought to be seen as a process, and not as a single event. Michel Balivet has developed the very persuasive thesis that the fall of Byzantium was less the destruction of a civilisation and more the creation of a new one through the fusion of Byzantine and Ottoman elements.⁷⁴ At a popular level there is much to commend this interpretation, but it works less well if civilisation is equated with a court or an elite culture. The Ottoman court developed a culture of great sophistication and refinement which owed absolutely nothing to Byzantium. The Ottomans were willing to tolerate the Orthodox Church. It had a valuable role to play in controlling the

Christian population, but it meant the relegation of the Greeks to a position of inferiority. While Constantinople remained Byzantine, there was at least the illusion of cultural parity. Mehmed II was deeply curious about Byzantium, but it was not an interest shared by any of his successors, while the growing power of the religious establishment or *‘ulema* within the Ottoman state ensured much harsher treatment for the Christian communities. The hopes that Michael Kritoboulos entertained in the aftermath of 1453 for fruitful cooperation of Ottoman and Greek proved largely illusory.

Notes

- 1 E. Legrand, *Bibliographie hellénique ou description raisonnée des ouvrages publiés par des Grecs au XVe et XVIe siècles* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1885–1906), II, 235–6.
- 2 *Oeuvres complètes de Georges Scholarios*, ed. L. Petit, K.A. Sidéridès and M. Jugie (Paris: Maison de la Bonne Presse, 1928–35), IV, 224–5.
- 3 B. Knös, *Histoire de la littérature néo-grecque: la période jusqu'en 1821* [Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis: Studia Graeca Upsaliensia, 1] (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1962), 159–65; M. Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 83–90; Pertusi, *La caduta di Costantinopoli*, II, 354–403; A. Papagianne, ‘He Polis heal: the Fall of Constantinople in 1453 in post-Byzantine popular literature’, *Al-Masaq*, 22 (2010), 27–37.
- 4 The best appreciation of George Sphrantzes is in M. Hinterberger, *Autobiographische Traditionen in Byzanz* [Wiener Byzantinistische Studien, XXII] (Vienna: Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1999), 331–43.
- 5 Sphrantzes, ed. Maisano, XXXVI, 14: 142.9–14. My translation.
- 6 Sphrantzes, ed. Maisano, XXXVI, 7: 140.5; transl. Philippides, 72.
- 7 Sphrantzes, ed. Maisano, XXXVI, 6: 138.24–6; transl. Philippides, 72.
- 8 Sphrantzes, ed. Maisano, XXXVI, 11: 140.24–8; transl. Philippides, 73. Sphrantzes even drafted the chrysobull handing over Mesembria to the Hungarian ruler.
- 9 Sphrantzes, ed. Maisano, XXXVI, 12: 142.3–5; transl. Philippides, 73.
- 10 Sphrantzes, ed. Maisano, XXIII, 4: 80.24–9; transl. Philippides, 50.
- 11 Sphrantzes, ed. Maisano, XLVIII, 3: 194.25–7; transl. Philippides, 95.
- 12 Sphrantzes, ed. Maisano, 65*–67*.
- 13 Laonicus Chalcocondyles, *Historiarum Libri Decem*, ed. I. Bekker [CSHB] (Bonn: Weber, 1843).
- 14 See H. Ditten, *Der Russland-Exkurs des Laonikos Chalkokondyles* [Berliner Byzantinische Arbeiten, 39] (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1968).

- 15 Bodnar and Foss, *Later Travels*, 298–300.
- 16 D.J. Geanakoplos, *Interaction of the 'Sibling' Byzantine and Western Cultures in the Middle Ages and Italian Renaissance (330–1600)* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976), 231–64.
- 17 Vryonis, Jr., *Byzantium, Seljuqs and Ottomans*, no. XII.
- 18 Wurm and Gamillscheg, 'Bemerkungen zu Laonikos Chalkokondyles', 213–19.
- 19 Ditten, *Der Russland-Exkurs des Laonikos Chalkokondyles*, 1–6.
- 20 Pace J. Harris, 'Laonikos Chalkokondyles and the rise of the Ottoman Turks', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 27 (2003), 153–70, it does seem that the coupling of *tyche* and *arete* is more likely to derive from Plethon than it does from Italian humanists.
- 21 Chalcocondyles, *Historiarum Libri Decem*, I, 4–5.
- 22 Harris, 'Influence of Plethon's idea of fate', 211–17.
- 23 D.R. Reinsch, 'Mehmet der Eroberer in der Darstellung der zeitgenössischen byzantinischen Geschichtsschreiber', in *Sultan Mehmet II.*, 24–5.
- 24 Woodhouse, *Gemistos Plethon*, 363–75.
- 25 D.R. Reinsch, 'Kritoboulos of Imbros: learned historian, Ottoman *raya* and Byzantine patriot', *Zbornik Radova Vizantološkog Instituta*, 40 (2003), 297–311.
- 26 Michael Kritoboulos, *Critobuli Imbriotae Historiae*, ed. D.R. Reinsch [CFHB, ser. Berol. 22] (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1983), I, 1, 1: 12.26; transl. Riggs, 9.
- 27 Kritoboulos, ed. Reinsch, I, 6–7: 14–15; transl. Riggs, 12.
- 28 Kritoboulos, ed. Reinsch, III, 14, 2: 134.3–12; transl. Riggs, 142.
- 29 Kritoboulos, ed. Reinsch, III, 20, 5: 143.17–21; IV, 7, 4–6: 162–3; transl. Riggs, 152, 173–4.
- 30 D.R. Reinsch, 'Byzantinisches Herrscherlob für den türkischen Sultan. Ein bisher unbekanntes Gedicht des Georgios Amirutzes auf Mehmed der Eroberer', in L. Burgmann, M.T. Fögen and A. Schminck (eds), *Cupido Legum* (Frankfurt am Main: Löwenklau Gesellschaft E.V., 1985), 195–210; B. Janssens and P. Van Deun, 'George Amiroutzes and his political oeuvre', in B. Janssens, B. Roosen and P. Van Deun (eds), *Philomathestatos: Studies in Greek and Byzantine Texts presented to Jacques Noret for his 65th Birthday* (Louvain: Peeters, 2004), 297–324.
- 31 Kritoboulos, ed. Reinsch, III, 9, 6: 128.27–8; transl. Riggs, 136.
- 32 Kritoboulos, 4–5; transl. Riggs, 3.
- 33 See Doukas, transl. Magoulias, 23–41.
- 34 Doukas, ed. Becker, XLII, 14: 318–19; transl. Magoulias, 244.
- 35 Doukas, ed. Becker, XLI, 1–19: 306–11; transl. Magoulias, 236–9.

- 36 Cf. St. Efthymiadis and A. Mazarakis, 'La chronique familiale du *Parisinus Gr.* 1601 et l'identité de son rédacteur', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 102 (2009), 615–25.
- 37 Kritoboulos, ed. Reinsch, II, 2, 1: 90–1; transl. Riggs, 94–5; Reinsch, 'Kritoboulos of Imbros', 298–9.
- 38 J. Darrouzès, 'Lettres de 1453', *Revue des études Byzantines*, 22 (1964), 72–127.
- 39 Ibid. 85–6.
- 40 Ibid. 78–9.
- 41 Ibid. 96–9.
- 42 Ibid. 80–4.
- 43 Ibid. 100–2.
- 44 Ibid. 90.
- 45 S. Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity: A Study of the Patriarchate of Constantinople from the Eve of the Turkish Conquest to the Greek War of Independence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 167–72; E.A. Zachariadou, *Δέκα τουρκικά έγγραφα για την Μεγάλη Εκκλησία* [Institute for Byzantine Research, Sources 2] (Athens: National Hellenic Research Foundation, 1996), 41–8; Blanchet, *Georges-Gennadios Scholarios*, 80–4.
- 46 Blanchet, *Georges-Gennadios Scholarios*, 71–2.
- 47 Ch.G. Patrinelis, 'Ο Θεόδωρος Ἀγαλλιανὸς ταυτιζόμενος πρὸς τὸν Θεοφάνην Μηδείας καὶ οἱ ἀνέκδοτοι Λόγοι του (Athens: privately printed, 1966); C.J.G. Turner, 'Notes on the works of Theodore Agallianos contained in the Codex Bodleianus Canonicus Graecus 49', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 61 (1968), 27–35.
- 48 Runciman, *Great Church in Captivity*, 184–5.
- 49 Patrinelis, *Agallianos*, 98.258–9.
- 50 Woodhouse, *Gemistos Plethon*, 322–56.
- 51 Blanchet, *Georges-Gennadios Scholarios*, 177–92.
- 52 Ibid. 102–10; J. Pelikan, *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom (600–1700)* [The Christian Tradition, 2] (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1974), 242.
- 53 Blanchet, *Georges-Gennadios Scholarios*, 136–54.
- 54 Woodhouse, *Gemistos Plethon*, 283.
- 55 Patrinelis, *Agallianos*, 103.442–50.
- 56 M.-H. Blanchet, 'Georges Gennadios Scholarios a-t-il été trois fois patriarche de Constantinople?', *Byzantion*, 71 (2001), 60–72.
- 57 E.A. Zachariadou, 'The Great Church in Captivity 1453–1586', in *Eastern Christianity*, ed. M.J. Angold [Cambridge History of Christianity V] (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 169–86.

- 58 A. Pertusi, *Fine di Bisanzio e fine del mondo: significato e ruolo storico delle profezie sull caduta di Costantinopoli in Oriente e in Occidente* [Nuovi Studi Storici, 3] (Rome: Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo, 1988), 58–62.
- 59 Blanchet, *Georges-Gennadios Scholarios*, 34–40.
- 60 See Barbour, *The Byzantine Thomism of Gennadios Scholarios*.
- 61 Runciman, *Great Church in Captivity*, 238–58.
- 62 Wurm and Gamillscheg, ‘Bemerkungen zu Laonikos Chalkokondyles’, 213–19.
- 63 J. Darrouzès in *Revue des études Byzantines*, 43 (1985), 297–8; P. Schreiner, ‘Die Epoche Mehmeds des Eroberers in zeitgenössischen Quellen aus dem Patriarcat’, in *Sultan Mehmet II.*, 36–7.
- 64 A. Biedl, ‘Matthaeus Camariotes. Specimen prosopographiae byzantinae’, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 35 (1935), 337–9; T. Conley, ‘Greek rhetorics after the fall of Constantinople. An introduction’, *Rhetorica*, 18 (2000), 265–94.
- 65 Stavrides, *Sultan of Vezirs*, 73–100.
- 66 E.A. Zachariadou, ‘Mount Athos and the Ottomans, c.1350–1550’, in *Eastern Christianity*, 162–8; G. Speake, *Mount Athos: Renewal in Paradise* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 113–30.
- 67 René Gothóni, *Tales and Truth: Pilgrimage on Mount Athos – Past and Present* (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1994), 26–9, 38.
- 68 K. Hajdú, ‘Pachomius, metropolit von Amaseia, als Handschriftschreiber’, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 94 (2001), 564–79.
- 69 Ph. Meyer, *Die Haupturkunden für die Geschichte der Athosklöster* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1894), no. XIII, 210–12.
- 70 Buondelmonti, *Description des îles de l’Archipel*, ed. Legrand, 92–4.
- 71 Bodnar and Foss, *Later Travels*, 120–34.
- 72 Syropoulos, ‘*Mémoires*’, §10, 170–1.
- 73 Pierre Belon, *Voyage au Levant (1553): Les observations de Pierre Belon du Mans*, ed. A. Merle (Paris: Chandeigne, 2001), 139–40.
- 74 Balivet, *Romanie Byzantine et pays de Rûm turc*; id., *Byzantins et Ottomans*.

CHAPTER 4

The Western reaction

I

The fall of Constantinople was all the more shocking for western opinion, because paradoxically it was not an event for which the West had prepared itself. For almost a century Constantinople had been surmounting threats to its existence apparently as serious as that which it faced in 1453. The reaction of the West to its fall was far from straightforward, which is understandable, given its complicated relationship with Byzantium. Constantinople was a landmark of the Latin Middle Ages. It was still regarded as an important centre of Christianity, above all as a repository of relics, which had been miraculously replenished since 1204. Byzantium was also a client of the West, but a reluctant and unreliable one. Without Western support its very existence was in doubt. Western powers regarded it as a responsibility, where the advantages marginally outweighed the disadvantages. Constantinople was the hub of a commercial network, upon which Italian trade depended. It was therefore in the interest of the Venetians and the Genoese to preserve its independence, but this was counterbalanced by the uncertainties associated with the continuing existence of Byzantium, whether in the form of the harassment of Italian merchants by Byzantine officials or as a result of the ingrained instability of Byzantine politics. The interest of the papacy in Constantinople was not as blatantly materialistic as that of the Venetians and Genoese. It was more a matter of reasserting its authority. The papacy understood that a regularisation of its relations with the Orthodox Church would constitute an important step in the rebuilding of its authority, which had come under the scrutiny of the so-called Conciliar Movement. The reunion of the two Churches negotiated at the council of Ferrara Florence in 1439 was an undoubted triumph for Pope Eugenius IV. However, it proved difficult to implement in the face of the growing resentment that it produced at Byzantium. The defeat of the Hungarian crusade at Varna in November 1444

appeared to confirm the conviction of Byzantine opponents of reunion that the papacy was incapable of providing any effective aid. Even the Byzantine Emperor John VIII Palaiologos seemed to be veering towards this point of view. He made no effort to have the reunion of Churches proclaimed officially in Constantinople, which only reinforced the reputation the Byzantines had among Westerners for duplicity. It would have been easy for Eugenius IV to abandon Byzantium to its fate, but this would have been to write off an important part of his programme for the restoration of papal authority, which rested, in part, on reviving old claims to hegemony over the Eastern Churches. Despite Byzantine reluctance, the papacy had a vested interest in protecting Constantinople against both the Turks and the Byzantines themselves. Its fall, as indeed turned out to be the case, would be a stain on the papacy's reputation, but to prevent this it was necessary to persuade the Byzantines of its imminence. By 1451, when the pro-unionist patriarch of Constantinople fled to Rome, it had become imperative that the papacy should discipline its recalcitrant client, in order to prevent the complete collapse of the Union of Churches. The Turkish threat was of less immediate concern, but the papacy was happy to use the alarm this produced at the Byzantine court as a way of imposing order on the Church of Constantinople. Pope Nicholas V's solution was to send the Greek Cardinal Isidore to Constantinople as papal legate, with the task of restoring order. The cardinal arrived at the end of October 1452. He made it clear to the Byzantine Emperor Constantine XI that the *quid pro quo* for aid from the West was the official proclamation of the Union of Churches in the Church of St Sophia, which duly took place on 12 December. The papacy's preparations for the despatch of an expedition to Constantinople were perhaps not quite as urgent as they should have been, because there was a belief that the mere threat of Western intervention would be sufficient to deter the Ottomans.¹

This was also the feeling in the Venetian senate, which had established a good working relationship with the new sultan and was on bad terms with the Byzantine emperor because of the petty measures he had taken against Venetian merchants working in Constantinople. The patricians of Venice did not see dealing with the situation developing around Constantinople as a matter of urgency. Since the siege of 1422 there had been a number of Ottoman demonstrations against Constantinople, but that was all they were. Mehmed II's reputation was still that of a ruler who wished to enjoy good relations with the Serenissima. Less sanguine, the Genoese took immediate steps to reinforce the defences of Constantinople in the shape of a small expeditionary force under the command of Giovanni Giustiniani Longo, whose exploits indicated what a larger force might have achieved. Otherwise,

not a great deal was done. Few in the West seemed to appreciate the full seriousness of the threat to Constantinople. Once the siege was under way the Venetian senate was still receiving optimistic reports from informants it had in place.² Given the difficulties there had been with the Byzantine emperor it felt that there was no harm in letting him stew in his own juice for a while. The Venetians had more pressing concerns, such as their rivalry with the duke of Milan in northern Italy; nor should one forget the domestic distractions then weighing upon the Doge Francesco Foscari (1423–57). Not only was he supervising the completion of the Ca' Foscari, but he was seeking his eldest son's recall from exile on a charge of high treason.³ Such aid as the West was willing to offer Byzantium was too little and too late. The Venetian relief fleet commanded by Giacomo Loredan did not set sail until 8 or 9 May. When Constantinople fell it had reached the Venetian base of Negroponte on the island of Euboea. On 11 April Pope Nicholas V appointed the archbishop of Ragusa commander of the papal fleet to go to the rescue of Constantinople, but it was still at Chios when survivors brought news of the city's fall.

The news reached Negroponte on 3 June and Candia in Crete on 9 June. But it was not until 17 June that the Venetian authorities at Negroponte despatched an official messenger, who reached Venice on 29 June.⁴ By then all kinds of rumours must have been circulating. The senators crowded on the balconies and at the windows hoping for a glimpse of the boat bringing news of Constantinople's fate. When the messenger arrived there were shouts of dismay. Once these had subsided the letter was read out. The details were both alarming and exaggerated. First, it was reported that the Genoese city of Pera had fallen to the Turks and all males over the age of six had been slaughtered. Then the next day it was Constantinople's turn. Again all males over the age of six had been butchered.⁵ The news was treated as a Venetian calamity. Many had relatives who had suffered. More had capital tied up in Constantinople. The estimate at the time was that Venetians had lost goods to the value of 20,000 ducats. It is now reckoned to have been somewhat greater. There was also concern about the fate of the fleet which the Venetians had sent to the aid of Constantinople. There was relief that it was still intact, but its homecoming a few days later was a sombre affair. No flags flew at the mastheads; no trumpets sounded.⁶ There seems to have been little or no sympathy for the Byzantines. It was felt as a Venetian failure. Once the initial shock had subsided, the concern was to retrieve something from the ruins. By 12 July it was agreed that circumstances were such that it might be wise to offer the Ottoman sultan and his vezirs gifts to the value of 1,200 ducats rather than the 500 ducats originally proposed. On 17 July the Venetian senate sent instructions to the ambassador already appointed to the Ottoman

court that he should continue his mission, which he did with surprising success. On 18 April 1454 he signed an agreement with Mehmed II, which allowed the Venetians to return to Constantinople, but their merchants were to pay a 2% customs duty, rather than being exempted from payment, as had been the case under the Byzantines.⁷

II

The Venetian senate communicated news of the fall of Constantinople to the papacy and the other powers of Christendom. Its letter to Pope Nicholas V was despatched on 30 June 1453. It contained all the lurid and misleading details about the horrors of the sack of Constantinople and expressed a deep fear that this was only the first step in the expansion of Ottoman power, which would threaten the whole of Christendom. It begged the pope to take the measures necessary to prevent this. Pope Nicholas V was devastated. He would later admit that it cast a shadow over his pontificate and that he was in some ways culpable. He sought to make amends on 30 September 1453 by proclaiming a crusade for the recovery of Constantinople. There was a guarded response, but this was not unusual. It needed time to get a crusade off the ground. While the pope took responsibility for organising the crusade in Italy, he left northern Europe to the Emperor Frederick III Habsburg (1452–93), whom the year before he had crowned emperor in Rome. It was his alliance with the papacy, sealed in 1448 with a concordat, which had allowed Frederick III to emerge as a force in German politics. Well aware of his debt to the papacy, the emperor responded by calling a diet at Regensburg to meet the following spring. In the event he did not attend because he was on bad terms with the German electors; he feared that the latter might take the opportunity to withdraw their support and promote another claimant to the imperial office. These political divisions meant that the Empire did not provide a practicable framework for the organisation of a crusade.⁸

Pope Nicholas V despatched one of the greatest preachers of the age, the Observantine Franciscan Giovanni da Capistrano, to support the emperor's efforts to organise a crusade against the Turks. But so dispiriting did the preacher find the atmosphere in the Empire that he moved to the kingdom of Hungary, where he found a greater appreciation of his talents, which was not surprising because the Hungarians were anticipating an Ottoman invasion. It came in 1456, when Mehmed II laid siege to the fortress of Belgrade, the key to the control of the middle Danube. No help came from the West. For the papacy its defence was of secondary importance, compared with mounting a crusade to recover Constantinople. However, its successful defence

proved that the crusading spirit was not quite dead and puts into perspective the failure of papal efforts to defend and then to recover Constantinople. If Giovanni da Capistrano had no success in Germany, his preaching had an electrifying effect in Hungary. He raised a largely peasant army which he led to the relief of Belgrade. He followed this up by storming the Ottoman camp. It was the most serious setback ever inflicted on Mehmed II.⁹

Capistrano's preaching touched much the same emotional chords in his audience as Pope Urban II or Peter the Hermit had done at the time of the first crusade. But then conditions in Hungary were not that far removed from those in France at the time of the preaching of the first crusade, while the Turkish threat was palpable in a way it was not in Northern Europe, where the crusade had become part of a chivalric ethos. At a personal level it might mean a life of pilgrimage, travel and tournaments with the occasional foray against the Moor in southern Spain, the heathen in Eastern Europe, and even the Turk in the Balkans. But less and less was it the responsibility of rulers. Local rivalries, combined with the pressures of the affairs of state, left them with little time or money to devote to the promotion of the crusade. The great exception among the rulers of Northern Europe was Philip the Good, duke of Burgundy (1419–67). He had the resources to take the business of crusade seriously and sent out agents to report on conditions in the Near East, as a preliminary to participation in a crusade to recover the Holy Land. In the meantime he made donations to charitable institutions to support pilgrimage to Jerusalem. He was the only Northern European ruler to make any contribution to the crusade of Varna, which came in the shape of a Burgundian flotilla. Its exploits in the Black Sea – though little more than piracy – bolstered the duke's international standing. His reaction to the fall of Constantinople was in keeping with his crusading reputation. He made a point of attending the imperial diet of Regensburg, which met in April 1454 to discuss a crusade, but his presence there secured nothing more concrete than a general declaration of support for a crusade. The diet put off further discussion to another meeting. It was not what Philip the Good had anticipated when two months previously he staged a series of festivities known as the Feast of the Pheasant, which were designed to stir up crusading fervour. It culminated in the duke along with members of his court taking the cross. The centrepiece of one of the tableaux was the figure of a woman placed on a high pillar. She was an allegory of Constantinople, whom it was their duty to rescue from the Turk, represented by a lion. This was pure theatre and should be treated as such – it is not evidence that the Burgundian court was living in a dream world. It may have been an extravagant charade, but one designed to enhance the image of the duke, who had found in the crusade a theme around which the nobility

of his sundry territories could unite in loyalty to the dynasty; a theme too which raised his international profile. This was a necessity for a ruler who controlled the commercial and industrial hub of Northern Europe.

Despite the whiff of opportunism, the duke of Burgundy's reaction to the news of the fall of Constantinople helped to generate real emotion, though it was for an image rather than for anything more concrete.¹⁰ The emphasis on image is immediately apparent from the deluxe edition of the *Travels* of Bertrandon de la Broquière, commissioned by Philip the Good in the immediate aftermath of the fall of Constantinople. It is dominated by its sumptuous illuminations, which have as their theme pilgrimage and crusade. There is a bird's-eye depiction of Constantinople under siege from the Ottomans and a luminous image of Jerusalem, which was the final destination of the crusade. Whereas Jerusalem is shown quite realistically as a city of domes, Constantinople is turned into a fairy-tale French city. The illuminations are at odds with Bertrandon de la Broquière's text, which contains a detailed description of the visit he made to Constantinople in 1433.¹¹ Bertrandon was a shrewd and accurate observer whose experiences had left him with little love for the Greeks, but great admiration for the Turks. He described Constantinople as made up of a series of villages. Within its walls open spaces predominated. The emperor was a tributary of the Ottoman sultan and controlled virtually nothing beside the city of Constantinople. But for all that Bertrandon was not entirely immune to a more romantic image of Constantinople. It was still a city of great churches housing wonderful collections of relics. Nor could Bertrandon ignore the glamour of the imperial court and its ladies. In other words, for all its accuracy his description of Constantinople bore the imprint of the *Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, which more than any other text informed the late medieval image of Constantinople. There too it appeared as a city of fine churches, including the fairest of them all, St Sophia. It was a treasure house of relics. If it was no longer a seat of Empire, it remained among the holiest of Christian cities.¹² The *Travels of Sir John Mandeville* present an idealised image of Constantinople, which influenced the text and, more particularly, the illustrations of the *Travels of Bertrandon de la Broquière*. But the discrepancy between idealised image and reality would not long survive the fall of Constantinople.

It was not only the Burgundian court which romanticised Constantinople. It was also a circle of Italian humanists, but they did so in a novel way.¹³ They too appreciated it as a treasure house, but of classical antiquity rather than of Christian relics. The key moments came in the 1420s. Giovanni Aurispa returned to Italy in 1423 after serving the Byzantine Emperor Manuel II Palaiologos as Latin secretary with a haul of in excess of 238 classical

Greek manuscripts.¹⁴ The previous year the Florentine antiquarian Cristoforo Buondelmonti had completed his *Book of the Islands of the Archipelago*. It contained a description of Constantinople, where a concentration on the monuments and inscriptions of late antiquity turned it into a survival of the classical past.¹⁵ The work was an instant success and did much to alter opinion about Constantinople among the Florentine humanists, to whom it was addressed. It helped that there were a number of young Italians who came to Constantinople to study. Among them was Francesco Filelfo, who spent much of the 1420s there.¹⁶ Many years later in 1469 he was in correspondence with an émigré Greek scholar about a manuscript which Filelfo had seen during his time at Constantinople. He remembered that it had belonged to an old *primikerios* or officer of St Sophia. The name escaped him, but he knew where the man had lived. It was in a house on the left-hand side as you went along the street leading to St Sophia. The *primikerios* had an impressive library, which included polemical works by his teacher Demetrios Kydones. Here you have an echo of Filelfo's student days in Constantinople: the city streets, private libraries, old controversies, and memories of famous scholars.¹⁷ It was an exciting time to be in Constantinople. Enea Silvio Piccolomini, the future Pope Pius II, famously declared that 'no Latin could consider himself properly educated, unless he had studied for a time at Constantinople'.¹⁸ Filelfo departed from Constantinople with some forty Greek manuscripts. This was quite a modest haul compared with that of Giovanni Aurispa, but it contributed to the impression that Constantinople was full of classical manuscripts. This romanticising of Constantinople was confined to a relatively narrow circle of humanists, but they were exactly the people who would help to orchestrate the Western reaction to the fall of Constantinople. It added a cultural layer to the symbolic, religious and strategic importance of the city, which ensured that the news of its loss would make its impact on Western opinion. However, as we shall see, once it had absorbed the initial shock, there would be a far colder appraisal of the meaning of the event for the West.

The most immediate, vocal and articulate reaction to the fall of Constantinople in the West came from the humanists attached to the Roman curia. Cardinal Bessarion – a Greek by birth – took the lead. He had argued the Orthodox case for union at the council of Ferrara Florence. His reward was a cardinal's hat. In the face of hostility at Constantinople he had made Rome his home and by 1453 he had become one of the leading figures at the papal curia. He had every reason to be emotionally involved in the fall of Constantinople. But just as powerful a voice was that of Enea Silvio Piccolomini, whose reaction was entirely his own, because at the time he was away from the Roman curia on a diplomatic mission to the Habsburg court. He received news of

the city's fall independently via Serbia and wrote immediately on 12 July 1453 to Pope Nicholas V bewailing the damage done to Christendom, but the emphasis was on cultural loss; on the destruction of manuscripts, many of which, he maintained, were still unknown to Latin scholars.¹⁹ It was an abominable calamity which, Piccolomini reminded the pope, would always mar his pontificate and erase memory of his many achievements. The pope was not to blame. He had simply failed to persuade the rulers of Christendom to act. It was now more than ever his duty to work for the recovery of Constantinople. In a letter to Nicholas of Cusa written on 21 July 1453 he compared the city with Athens at the time of the Roman Empire.²⁰ It was in other words the pre-eminent seat of learning of its time. Its fall meant the end of Greek civilisation, because the Turks were not like the Romans, who had appreciated what Greece had to offer in the way of civilisation. The Turks were the cruellest of peoples. Their conquest of Constantinople was a prelude to an assault on Italy. Enea pleaded with Nicholas to use the full weight of his influence to impress upon the papal curia the necessity of uniting Christendom for a crusade to recover Constantinople. He needed to win over Nicholas, whose learning, spirituality and devotion to reform gave him great moral authority. Nicholas was known for his irenic approach to other faiths. He had been Pope Eugenius IV's envoy to Constantinople in 1437 with the task of preparing the way for the Union Council. The fall of Constantinople affected him deeply, but perhaps in an unexpected way. It strengthened him in his conviction that Christianity should find common ground with other faiths, Islam above all. He set out his views in his *De Pace Fidei*, which he wrote under the immediate impact of news of the fall of Constantinople.²¹ It begins:

*There was a certain man who, having formerly seen the sites of the region of Constantinople, was inflamed with zeal for God as a result of those deeds that were reported to have been perpetrated at Constantinople most recently and most cruelly by the king of the Turks. Consequently, with many groanings he beseeched the Creator of all, because of His kindness, to restrain the persecution that was raging, more fiercely than usual on account of the differences of rite between the religions.*²²

The certain man was Nicholas of Cusa himself. He was describing the emotional impact which the news of the fall of Constantinople had on him. It induced a vision, in which he was taken up into heaven where, after listening to representatives of different faiths, the King of Heaven enjoined peace. *De Fidei Pace* purported to be an account of this vision.

This was part of a running debate at the papal curia over whether or not to send aid to Constantinople in the form of a crusade. Nicholas of Cusa was

arguing that the fall of Constantinople presented an opportunity to bring peace rather than war, but this was not the view of the majority for whom it was an admonition to those who had previously opposed sending aid. The fall of Constantinople also made a deep impression on Pope Nicholas V, who understood that it disgraced his pontificate. On 30 September 1453 he issued his crusading bull. If nothing else, it helped to allay a widespread fear that the conquest of Constantinople was only a preliminary to a Turkish invasion of Italy. Few, on the other hand, shared the conviction there was among humanists that the Turks were a threat to civilisation. Even fewer would have accepted this as a justification for a crusade. However, the victory over Mehmed II at Belgrade in 1456 provided a stimulus for the papal plans for a crusade to recover Constantinople, which might otherwise have been abandoned for lack of concrete support. Under cover of the successful defence of Belgrade a papal fleet was able to seize the islands of Thasos, Samothrake and Lemnos, which were ideally situated to serve as advanced bases for a thrust against Constantinople. The rebellion of the Albanians under Skanderbeg against Turkish rule was a further cause of optimism in papal circles. Pressure for a crusade came from within the papal curia, where both Cardinal Bessarion and Enea Silvio Piccolomini were powerful voices.²³ It received still greater impetus when the latter ascended the throne of St Peter in 1458 as Pius II. His *Commentaries* or Notebooks provide a personal view of his pontificate and present the crusade as its leitmotif.²⁴ His immediate reaction to the fall of Constantinople revealed his commitment to its recovery, but his attachment to the crusade went deeper than this. It was a solution to the abiding concern of the post-conciliar papacy: which was how to recover the effective leadership of Christendom lost in the course of the Great Schism. His mentor was Pope Eugenius IV (1431–47), a man to whom he had every reason to be grateful, for despite Piccolomini's many years in the service of the council of Basel this pope had magnanimously welcomed him back into the fold of the Roman curia and had set him on the path to promotion. Eugenius IV's major achievement was the council of Ferrara Florence, which was far more than a forum for the reunion of the Latin and Greek Churches. In one form or another it continued until 1445 and re-established communion with the majority of the Eastern Churches. It also effectively ended conciliarist opposition. Here Enea Silvio Piccolomini had an important part to play, because he was in charge of the papal delegation that succeeded in persuading the German Emperor Frederick III Habsburg to abandon support for the conciliarists at Basel. Thanks to the council of Ferrara Florence Eugenius IV appeared to have restored the prestige of the papacy, but its foundations remained fragile. The failure of the Varna crusade in 1444 was a setback, while

the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople threatened to undo all that had been achieved under Eugenius IV.

Enea Silvio Piccolomini felt this more strongly than most and looked to the crusade as a means of preserving Eugenius IV's legacy. His willingness to embrace the crusade has left the impression of a man unable to escape the papacy's medieval past. This has baffled those scholars who reckon this to be at odds with Piccolomini's accomplishments as a humanist. It is not so perplexing to those less willing to draw too sharp a distinction between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. It was difficult for the papacy to alter either its purpose or its institutions. It could on the other hand adapt to new circumstances and new ways of thinking. So, once he had become pope, Piccolomini was determined to present the crusade not as part of a chivalric ethos, but in humanist terms as a defence of Western civilisation against the barbarism of the Turks. His hopes that this might transform the crusade into an instrument for the spiritual regeneration of Christendom were disappointed, but momentarily they injected new energy into the crusade to recover Constantinople.²⁵

Conditions for launching a crusade still seemed propitious. In 1454 the major Italian powers, including the papacy, concluded the peace of Lodi, which ended more than half a century of intermittent warfare between Venice, Milan, Florence and Naples. One factor in bringing these Italian powers to the negotiating table was apprehension about the implications of the fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans. The guarantee of continued peace in Italy was the Holy League formed under the aegis of the papacy to hold in check Ottoman aggression. Pius II aimed to build on this by calling a congress of European powers, to meet in Mantua by June 1459. Its one purpose was to obtain general agreement to the launch of a crusade against the Turks. Following his address to the delegates on 26 September Pius II was able to obtain consent on paper to the organisation of a crusade, but holding the different European powers to their promises proved nigh impossible. In practical terms, all that the Congress of Mantua achieved was the despatch of a few hundred mercenaries to the Peloponnese to help its ruler, the Despot Thomas Palaiologos, who had been represented at the congress. At least the Congress of Mantua kept the crusade and Byzantium on the agenda. Pius II had placed considerable hopes in the Emperor Frederick III Habsburg, whom he knew well from his earlier activities as a diplomat, but no help was to be forthcoming from that quarter. This did not prevent Pius II from issuing a crusading bull on 14 January 1460. The following year he issued in good medieval style a challenge to Mehmed II to convert to Christianity. His failure to inform the sultan of his challenge suggests that it was meant for internal

consumption. It was intended as a way of maintaining the momentum of his crusading plans at a time when the initial shock generated by the fall of Constantinople was beginning to subside.²⁶ Enough time had now elapsed for the different powers to make a sanguine evaluation of the significance of the fall of Constantinople. In Italy it was becoming clear that the Turks did not represent any immediate threat. Florence and Milan even saw ways of turning the Ottoman victory to their advantage. The former hoped to improve its commercial position in Ottoman markets at the expense of the Venetians and the Genoese. The latter saw an understanding with the sultan as a way of embarrassing the Venetians, who were rivals for hegemony in northern Italy. The Venetians, for their part, had quickly come to terms with the Ottomans, confident that they would be able to retain their commercial ascendancy at Constantinople, but by now they were beginning to have second thoughts, which worked to the advantage of Pius II's crusading plans.

At first, Pius II was not happy about Venetian cooperation. He thought that the claims of the marketplace were bound to corrupt the spirit of the crusade.²⁷ His experience as a diplomat also taught him that Venetian participation in a crusade would alienate other Italian powers. He continued to have reservations about Venetian commitment to the crusade, which Cardinal Bessarion, his legate to Venice, did his best to counter. By now Pius II was ailing. He must have known that he did not have much longer to live. He had made it clear that he intended to lead the crusade in person. This was an extraordinary decision. There had been many crusades, but never one led by a pope. Pius II's *Commentaries* give us an insight into his state of mind in the months before he took the cross on 18 June 1464. He told the College of Cardinals that he had to do this because of the undertakings he had made to the doge of Venice and the duke of Burgundy, both of whom were preparing fleets to link up with the papal expedition. He understood that without his personal participation there would be no crusade and that the failure to mount a crusade would only increase the bitter criticism there was of the Church. He believed that the crusade against the Turks was a way of purifying the Church.²⁸ This conformed to the traditional notion of the crusade as a penitential exercise. By leading the crusade in person Pius II would be acting for the well-being of the Church. It was a way of atoning for the failures of the Church, most obviously during the Great Schism but also symbolised in the fall of Constantinople.

Towards the end of July 1464 Pius II reached Ancona, where the papal fleet lay at anchor. He awaited the arrival of the Venetian fleet commanded by the Doge Cristoforo Moro. It duly appeared on 12 August 1464, but Pius II was dead three days later. The crusade was abandoned. The Burgundian fleet was at

Marseilles when news of the pope's death reached it. Philip the Good, duke of Burgundy, immediately recalled it. This was the end of active Burgundian involvement in the crusade. Philip the Good, who had been the driving force behind Burgundian commitment to the crusade, died in 1467. His son Charles the Bold continued to use the crusade for propaganda purposes in his struggle with the French king Louis XI, who was notoriously contemptuous of the crusade, but French pressure on the Burgundian territories ruled out participation in any crusading venture.²⁹ Pius II's death did not of itself put an end to thoughts of the crusade. His successor, Paul II (1464–71), continued to promote the crusade, but, as we shall see, war against the Turks had entered a stage where the crusade was scarcely relevant. If the crusade remained on the papal agenda, it was because it had become too deeply incised on the collective consciousness of Western Christendom to be easily abandoned, but its resonances were increasingly of an ideal distilled in a distant past. It was a disavowal of Pius II's vision of the crusade as an instrument capable of energising and purifying Christian society.

The long history of the crusade was testimony to its ability to evolve in response to new challenges and perspectives. The humanist concept of the crusade as a defence of Christian civilisation against barbarism was only its latest manifestation, but it turned out to be its last before the modern era. It crystallised as a reaction to the fall of Constantinople to the Turks. Its proponents were a handful of humanists who clustered round the papal curia and helped to create the climate of opinion there which brought Pius II, the foremost advocate of crusade, to the throne of St Peter. But transforming the crusade in such a way as to give it new meaning and purpose required action. It was something that Pius II understood, but his death meant that it would never happen. The humanist notion of a crusade to defend civilisation never gained general currency. It became, as had been threatening for so long, a tired convention, a matter of following 'an antique drum'. It lost the urgency that it had for a moment recovered under Pius II. Humanists continued to produce crusade rhetoric, but the terms of the debate had changed. It was no longer about any realistic possibility of mounting a crusade to rescue Constantinople. It was more a matter of the nature of the threat posed by the Ottomans. The theme developed in humanist circles of the Turks as the enemies of civilisation would eventually prevail, but it was largely divorced from any commitment to crusading.³⁰

The papacy had taken on a special responsibility for the security of Constantinople and had made this part of a scheme for the restoration of papal authority. It was therefore inevitable that the city's fall to the Ottomans diminished the prestige of the papacy, which suffered still further

when it became apparent that it could not mount a crusade for the recovery of Constantinople. The papacy was in an impossible position. It could neither abandon nor reinvigorate the ideal of the crusade, which simply withered away. In retrospect, it would seem that the traditional crusade had effectively come to an end with the disaster at Nikopolis in 1396, when a largely Burgundian crusade came to grief at the hands of the Ottomans under Bayezid I (1389–1402). Paradoxically, it had the effect of ensuring a continuing devotion to the crusade at the court of Burgundy, which will account for its febrile reaction to the news of the fall of Constantinople. The duke of Burgundy did more than any other northern ruler to assist Pius II in the launching of a crusade, but his immediate recall of the Burgundian squadron on news of the pope's death suggests that even he was beginning to understand how futile crusading had now become. The fall of Constantinople acted as an instrument of clarification. It brought home to people in the West that however regrettable its extinction might be, Byzantium did not matter very much. Considered realistically, concern for Constantinople had become part of a charade, which had little relevance to political developments in the West. Of much greater concern was how the Ottomans would relate to an emerging European state system. It is little wonder that informed opinion in the West soon lost interest in the fall of Constantinople and turned instead to the more pressing topic of the nature of the Ottoman threat.³¹

III

It might have been better for Venice if it too had abandoned the struggle against the Ottomans the moment Pius II died, but its agenda had always been different. Its adhesion to Pius II's crusade was sheer opportunism. It had long been trying to find realistic means of repairing the damage done to its interests in the East by the fall of Constantinople. The decision to commit Venetian forces to an invasion of Ottoman territories in the Peloponnese predated its alliance with Pius II. As we have already seen, the Venetian senate's immediate reaction to news of the fall of Constantinople was to come to terms with the victorious Ottoman sultan, but this was only a holding action. It was clear that the fall of Constantinople left the Venetian territories in Greece exposed to Ottoman expansion; nowhere more so than the island of Euboea or Negroponte, which is why the Venetian authorities immediately despatched a famous engineer to the island to strengthen its defences.³² Still more indicative of their worries was their recall of a master shipwright, who had been exiled to Patras in the Peloponnese because of his debts. They did not want him falling into the hands of the Ottomans.³³ This is a reminder

of well-founded Venetian fears that with the conquest of Constantinople the Ottomans would become a naval power capable of challenging Venetian dominance at sea.

What the Venetians could not have foreseen was the unsettling effect that the fall of Constantinople had on the Greeks of Crete.³⁴ It was the catalyst for the Siphii Vlastos conspiracy, which had its roots in the religious divisions between the Orthodox of Crete. These were the product of the Union of Churches reached at the council of Ferrara Florence. Though in a minority the unionists controlled the organisation of the Orthodox Church in Crete, thanks to the support of the Venetian authorities. The appointment of a unionist as *protopapas* of Rethymnon in 1452 angered Xiphilinos Vlastos, the head of one of the most powerful Greek families of the city. He set about organising a conspiracy to drive the Venetians from the island, but was betrayed to the Venetian authorities by a Greek priest. Vlastos was seized and executed in August 1454, but this did not put an end to the unrest. Four years later there was a report of a mission sent from Constantinople by the new patriarch to strengthen the Orthodox in their faith. There were rumours that the new *protopapas* of Rethymno had sought consecration from the patriarch at Constantinople and was in secret communication via a monk of Candia with the sultan himself.³⁵ The worry for the Venetian authorities was that many Orthodox believed that Mehmed II's restoration of the Greek patriarchate conferred on the sultan the political legitimacy once enjoyed by the Byzantine emperor. They suspected that the dissemination of such ideas among the Cretans was the work of refugees from Constantinople and the Peloponnese. They were convinced that it was Orthodox priests who were mainly responsible for the mounting disaffection of the native Cretans. It was therefore decreed that there should be no further consecration of priests for five years and that the number of priests should be reduced to one or two per village. When consecration resumed, new priests would have to travel to Venice to take an oath of loyalty. There was a ban on Orthodox priests coming from outside Crete.³⁶ The change of atmosphere was felt in Venice itself. There had been tentative approval for the construction of a chapel for the celebration of the Greek rite. In 1457 this was countermanded and the destruction of the half-built chapel ordered.³⁷ The fall of Constantinople led in the short term to a marked deterioration of relations between the Venetian authorities and their Orthodox subjects.³⁸

The Venetians may well have overreacted because of the humiliation they suffered as a result of the loss of Constantinople, for which they were blamed by both Latins and Greeks for their failure to act decisively. Without ever being very convincing the Venetian senate defended itself over and over again

against this charge in letters sent to foreign powers. The fall of Constantinople involved heavy financial loss, which made a difficult situation for the Venetians worse. The public finances were already breaking down. Venice, in the same way as other Italian cities, had relied on the *Monte*, a funded debt, to meet extraordinary expenditure, but this failed at the end of 1453 at more or less the same time as the collapse of the most important Venetian bank, which was run by the Soranzo brothers.³⁹ These financial difficulties coincided with a political crisis. Among the great Venetian families there was a growing dissatisfaction with the Doge Francesco Foscari (1423–57). In 1453 he had already been in office longer than any other doge. The loss of Constantinople underlined how out of touch he was. He seemed far more concerned with overseeing the construction of the Ca' Foscari than with the damage done to Venetian interests in the East, where he had adopted a *laissez-faire* policy towards the Ottomans. This was shaped by his unhappy experience of the Venetian annexation of Thessaloniki in 1423, which culminated in its conquest by the Ottomans seven years later. He decided that there was far more to be gained from cooperation with the Ottomans than from confrontation. His view was that a passive stance was the best safeguard of Venice's interests in the East at a time when strengthening its position on the mainland was becoming a matter of urgency. But the costs were enormous and involved a series of expensive and unpopular wars with Milan. The loss of Constantinople was a humiliation, which appeared to demonstrate how misguided Foscari's foreign policy had been. In addition, the doge gave his enemies a hostage to fortune in the shape of his son Jacopo, who was too ambitious for his father's good. In 1451 Jacopo was exiled to the island of Crete for taking bribes from the Republic's enemies. Soon after the fall of Constantinople he was in secret communication with Mehmed II. He hoped to persuade the sultan to send a galley to rescue him from exile. It was a hare-brained scheme, but quite enough to scare the Venetian authorities, which were busy enough damping down unrest among the native population of the island. In 1456 Jacopo was brought to Venice to face another trial. He was found guilty, but a proposal that he be beheaded was not approved. Instead, he was sent back to exile in Crete. This was the prelude to a direct attack on his father by members of the Council of Ten, who the next year removed him from office. This was an episode without precedent in Venetian history. It was more usual to assassinate unpopular doges.

The political uncertainties associated with the opposition to Francesco Foscari continued after his overthrow and made it very difficult to formulate any clear line of policy towards the Ottomans. In the meantime, Venice's position in the East deteriorated.⁴⁰ Though well aware of the dangers, Venice had

in 1460 been unable to prevent the Ottoman annexation of the Peloponnese, which left its colonial territories still more exposed. Doge Cristoforo Moro (1462–71) hoped to restore Venice's position in the East under the cover of Pope Pius II's preparations for a crusade. In 1463 he sent an expeditionary force to the Peloponnese with conquest in mind. It was a complete failure, as was an attempt to seize the island of Lesbos. The Venetians had left their response to the fall of Constantinople too late. It was not undertaken for any idealistic reasons; only out of the realisation that unless something was done they might lose all their colonial territories to the Turks. Almost from the start the war with the Ottomans went against the Venetians. There were a series of setbacks, the most serious of which was the loss of Negroponte in 1470. Venice's last hope was its alliance with Uzun Hasan, the most powerful ruler of eastern Anatolia, who was equally alarmed by Ottoman expansion, but his death in 1478 left the Venetians isolated. All they could do was to sue for peace. The terms of the treaty of 1479 were harsh. Venice abandoned Negroponte, which was the real prize, and with it any significant presence in the Aegean. It had to pay the Ottoman sultan not only an indemnity of 100,000 ducats but also an annual tribute of 10,000 ducats.⁴¹

In practical terms the war of 1463–79 was among the most important consequences of the fall of Constantinople.⁴² It confirmed what 1453 had intimated: that a significant shift had occurred in the balance of power. Ever since the fourth crusade Constantinople had functioned as the hub of Venice's commercial network in the East, which stretched from the Black Sea to Crete. Its ascendancy was a corollary of the weakness of the Byzantine Empire. Mehmed II had no intention of allowing the Venetians to exploit Constantinople in the way they had done under the Byzantine emperors. Venetian merchants continued to trade at Constantinople, but they lost their dominant position. They were there on sufferance. Venice was on the defensive, as one by one the Ottomans picked off its colonies. The fall of Constantinople clarified the position of Venice in the East. It no longer exercised an ascendancy over the trade routes fanning out from Constantinople, but was pushed to the fringes. Thenceforward Crete became the main centre of its interests. In the aftermath of the fall of Constantinople the Venetians began to realise the nature of the power they were pitted against. They continued to fight wars against the Ottomans in a stubborn effort to preserve a foothold in the eastern Mediterranean, but they did not demonise the Ottomans. Instead, they carefully analysed their system of government, in which they found much to admire. In other words, they treated the Ottoman Empire much as they did any of the European powers with which they had to deal.⁴³ This does not mean that the Ottomans were ever fully drawn into a European state

system. Its formidable strengths allowed the Ottoman Empire to stand outside and above any such system well into the eighteenth century.⁴⁴ Sharing the Venetians' realistic assessment of Ottoman power was Machiavelli, who detected similarities with the Roman Empire.⁴⁵ This was only one strand of a debate about the exercise of political power which represented a break with medieval attitudes.

IV

The fall of Constantinople did not of itself launch such a debate, but it emerged from the disquiet that the event occasioned, for not only did it emphasise the inadequacy of the crusade as a means either of defending Constantinople or of countering Ottoman expansion but it also called in question the very nature and purpose of the Latin West.⁴⁶ Indicative of this was the generalisation around the time of the fall of Constantinople of the term Europe as an alternative to Christendom. In his *Ad defendenda pro Europa Hellesponti claustra* (*On the necessity of defending the straits of the Hellespont for the sake of Europe*) the scholar George of Trebizond made an impassioned plea in 1452 to Pope Nicholas V that he safeguard Constantinople, because it acted as a bulwark protecting the West, which he chose to call 'Europe', where in the past 'Christendom' would have been preferred.⁴⁷ The use of the term Europe presupposed a rather different view of the West, which was not only defined by its faith but also by a culture rooted in the classical past. The preservation of that past became a duty, which underlined the importance of Constantinople, because it had become an article of faith among Italian humanists that it was a treasure house of Greek antiquity. It was Enea Silvio Piccolomini – the future Pius II – who did much to popularise this idea, just as he was among the first to make consistent use of the term Europe, even entitling one of his later works *De Europa*, which he finished compiling in 1458. In it he collected together his impressions of the different parts of Europe which he had visited. For him Europe was something more than a geographical expression. It represented a distinct civilisation, which was – now that Constantinople had fallen – more than ever under threat from the Turks. Although Pius II did not underestimate the threat from Islam, the essence of his quarrel with the Turks was not that they were Muslims, but that they were barbarians. He was using the term in its classical sense of enemies of civilisation.⁴⁸ This was quite a novel way of looking at the Turks, who until the mid-fifteenth century had generally enjoyed a reputation for honesty and bravery among Westerners. Bertrandon de la Broquière came back from his travels in the early 1430s immensely impressed by the Turks he

had encountered. He much preferred them to the Greeks he met. Westerners were inclined to subscribe to the legend of Turkish descent from the Trojans (*Teucris*), which helped to explain their apparent similarity of temperament to others, such as the French, who equally claimed Trojan ancestry. Pius II was having none of this. He went to great lengths to demonstrate their Scythian (and therefore barbarian) ancestry. In the years following the fall of Constantinople he succeeded in elaborating a coherent view of Europe's place in the world. Now that its eastern bastion had fallen to the Turk, it too was under threat from the forces of barbarism. These had to be checked, if civilisation was to survive. This became the new orthodoxy, which survived more or less intact into the eighteenth century, even if with the benefit of hindsight we can see how flawed a vision it was. It was a view of the world which demonised the Turks. It also condemned Byzantium to irrelevance, as a past that had no bearing on the present.

More surprising was the lack of interest shown by the papacy in the restored Orthodox patriarchate of Constantinople. A possible explanation for this is that the Latin Church was content with the fiction that the council of Ferrara Florence had settled the outstanding issues. Another is that by 1453 the main focus of the debate on its place in the world had shifted from its relations to the Greek Church to those with Islam. This was largely the work of two conciliarists, John of Segovia and Nicholas of Cusa. In 1453 the latter produced his *De Pace Fidei*, in which he advocated a reasoned understanding of Islam, rather than confrontation, as the most effective way of proceeding.⁴⁹ The fall of Constantinople did not make him reconsider his ideas, but it had a dramatic effect on George of Trebizond, who only the year before had been appealing to Pope Nicholas V to go to the aid of Constantinople. With the Aristotelian tag in mind that 'God does nothing in vain' he concluded that the fall of Constantinople presaged cosmic change, nothing less than the drama of the Last Days.⁵⁰ There was little exceptional in this. It was a very common reaction to the fall of Constantinople, which united Christian and Muslim alike. Nor was George of Trebizond unique in his belief that it was a divine punishment meted out on the Byzantines, because they were bad Christians. In the same way as many others he thought that Mehmed II was acting as the instrument of God. However, the conclusion he drew from this was quite his own. He was convinced that, whether Mehmed II was aware of it or not, he had a divine mission to unite mankind in preparation for the Last Judgement. All he had to do to fulfil his destiny was to convert to the true faith, which was that espoused by Rome. So excited was George of Trebizond by his understanding of the meaning of the fall of Constantinople that he determined to present his ideas directly to the sultan.

Despite making the journey to Constantinople he never received an audience with the sultan.⁵¹ It just went to show how little resonance his ideas had. George of Trebizond did not count for much. He was an outsider: a Greek from Crete, who had studied in Italy as a young man and had converted to Rome. He had some reputation as a scholar, but as a Latinist rather than as a Hellenist. He had briefly belonged to Cardinal Bessarion's circle, but by 1453 they had fallen out. His bizarre interpretation of the fall of Constantinople may be linked to personal difficulties at the time, but all this meant was that his reaction to the event was that much more extreme for all thinking men were in their different ways forced to ponder the meaning of the fall of Constantinople. Few dismissed the Byzantines as brutally as George did, but most came to the same conclusion that they had become irrelevant.

In the West there was a strong current of opinion spearheaded by Leonardo of Chios, archbishop of Mitylene, that the Byzantines had brought the disaster on themselves not only because of their lack of enthusiasm for the Union of Churches, but also because of personal failings, with greed to the fore. After an initial moment of sorrow there was not a great deal of sympathy for Byzantine refugees in the West, who soon came to be seen as scroungers. There was very little understanding or empathy with Byzantine values. The main point of contact before 1453 had been over theology. But in Latin eyes the proclamation of the reunion of the two Churches at the council of Ferrara Florence settled the matter. A century would pass before the papal curia would again take any real interest in the Church of Constantinople. This indifference was more than reciprocated by the patriarchate. The fall of Constantinople produced a hiatus in ecclesiastical relations between Rome and Constantinople that truly marked the end of a chapter. Such interest as Latins showed in the Greek Church focused on relics. The transfer of relics continued. In August 1462 the Venetian Senate heard that the head of St George, which was kept on the island of Aigina, was beginning to work miracles. It immediately ordered its transfer to the safekeeping of San Giorgio Maggiore in Venice.⁵² This must have been done in emulation of the translation of an even more important relic earlier in the year. This was the head of St Andrew, which belonged to the Church of Patras. It was a gift to Pope Pius II from the exiled Despot Thomas Palaiologos. On Palm Sunday 1462 the relic arrived in Rome, where it was received with due ceremony. This has been described as 'the supreme moment of Pius II's pontificate'. How much it meant to him is apparent from the long description of the event which the pope provides in his *Commentaries*. He prayed 'that through the saint's merits and intercession the insolence of the infidel Turk would be crushed'. He noted too that Cardinal Isidore, who had been confined to his

house for several years following a stroke, was so moved by the arrival of the relic that he left his sickbed and followed the procession to its resting place for the night at the church of S. Maria del Popolo, where the cardinal received special permission from Pius II to kiss the relic.⁵³

Italians may have been happy to acquire relics from Byzantium, but they were relatively indifferent to Byzantine art. It was usual to fashion new containers for the relics more suited to Italian taste. This was even true of Byzantine icons, which were often supplied with new *revêtements* in some appropriately Western style. Even the Cretan icons, for which there was a demand in Italy, were tailored to Western tastes.⁵⁴ They were of course curiosities, which made no impact on artistic developments in Italy. Italians disregarded most of what we would today consider as essentials of Byzantine civilisation. They concentrated on only a single aspect: its classical heritage. They were avid collectors of Greek manuscripts, preferably classical, but almost any would do. They did not show any special interest in illuminated manuscripts. As a result relatively few made their way into the important manuscript collections which were being formed in Italy in the mid-fifteenth century. Italian humanists were interested in the texts, but realised that they still needed the help of Greek scholars if they were to understand them properly.⁵⁵ Initially, they showed considerable generosity in supporting Greek scholars fleeing from Constantinople. This was only the final phase of the transfer of Byzantium's classical heritage to Italy and the West, which had been going on for more than half a century. In this process 1453 was of less importance than 1423, which N.G. Wilson singles out as the critical year. This was when an Italian, Vittorino da Feltre, opened a school at Mantua, where the teaching of Greek was an important part of the curriculum. It was also the year that Giovanni Aurispa brought back his haul of manuscripts from Constantinople.⁵⁶

By 1453 the study of Greek in Italy had probably become self-sustaining, but the continued influx of manuscripts and scholars in the immediate aftermath ensured that a probability became a certainty. However, the demand for the services of Greek scholars was beginning to moderate. With very few exceptions those reaching Italy after 1453 enjoyed rather modest careers compared with those, such as Theodore Gazes⁵⁷ and Demetrios Khalkokondyles,⁵⁸ who were already in place. Teaching positions were more difficult to come by and usually meant going either to the south of Italy or Sicily or outside Italy altogether. Aspiring Greek scholars no longer found quite the same enthusiastic welcome in Rome, Naples, Florence, Padua, Venice and Milan as had been the case before 1453. There were distinguished scholars from Constantinople, such as Michael Apostoles, who despite much trying failed to establish a permanent footing in Italy.⁵⁹ His teacher, John Argyropoulos, arrived in Italy

at much the same time as Apostoles. He too at first experienced difficulty in obtaining a teaching position and went off to explore the possibilities of France and England, but was called back to teach Greek in Florence, where he was in post by 1456. He had the great advantage of already being a graduate of the University of Padua and a convert to Rome with an easy command of Latin.⁶⁰ With him at the University of Padua was another Greek scholar, Andronikos Kallistos, who also escaped from the fall of Constantinople. His career in Italy was more modest, but he did teach at Padua and then at Bologna before replacing Argyropoulos at Florence in 1471. He then tried his luck in France and England, dying in London around 1476. While students at Padua in the early 1440s, both Argyropoulos and Kallistos had as their patron Palla Strozzi, an exiled Florentine nobleman, who more than forty years earlier had played a key part in the negotiations which brought Manuel Chrysoloras to teach Greek in Florence. He was still alive at the time of the fall of Constantinople and his backing certainly explains why Argyropoulos did so well. It was his grandson, Donato Acciajuoli, who engineered Argyropoulos's appointment to the Florentine chair.⁶¹

The most generous of patrons was certainly Pope Nicholas V (1447–55). He spent vast sums of money on creating a papal library, which included both Latin and Greek texts. After the fall of Constantinople he sent collectors to the eastern Mediterranean to bring back Greek manuscripts. This earned him the approval of Francesco Filelfo, who was adamant that 'Greece had not perished but thanks to the good offices of the one and only Pope Nicholas had migrated to Italy'.⁶² Even before the fall of Constantinople the pope inaugurated a programme of the translation of important Greek texts into Latin. Some were classical, but many were patristic. Nicholas V was aware of the inadequacy of most existing translations of the Greek Fathers. He had attended the council of Ferrara Florence, which had highlighted the problem of translations of patristic texts. It had also emphasised the contribution made by the Greek Fathers to the theological foundations of the Latin Church.⁶³

V

Complementing the efforts of Nicholas V were those of Cardinal Bessarion, who presided over the final phase of the transfer of Greek learning, sacred and profane, to the West.⁶⁴ Without him the impact of the fall of Constantinople on the West would have been muffled, while it is unlikely that there would have been as systematic a collection of Greek manuscripts as the one he undertook. He provided a focus for Byzantine refugees. By 1453 he had become one of the most powerful figures at the papal curia. It was

a remarkable achievement carried out in no more than a dozen years. In 1439 he returned home from the council of Ferrara Florence with other members of the Byzantine delegation, but, unable or unwilling to influence events in Constantinople, he rejoined the council for its closing sessions and was installed as a cardinal of the Roman Church. He set about acquiring Latin to the high standard expected of a cardinal and, indeed, became a very proficient Latin stylist. He was able to act as a bridge between Byzantine and Latin cultures. Pope Eugenius IV appointed him protector of the Greek monastery of Grottaferrata outside Rome. The supervision of the Basilian monasteries of southern Italy seemed the ideal way of making use of the talents of this Greek cardinal, but it contributed rather little to the advancement of the Union of Churches or to the salvation of Constantinople, which were the guiding lights of Bessarion's career in the West. His chance came in 1449, when Pope Nicholas V appointed him papal legate to Bologna, the key to the Papal States. He was first made bishop of Sabina and then on 23 April 1449 cardinal bishop of Tusculum. At last he was somebody that counted; what was more, he was rich. He was in a position to support individuals and projects which appealed to him and was able to create a literary salon, or, in Byzantine terms, a *theatron*. Gravitating to it were many of the Greek scholars already in Italy, but it also became a magnet for Italian humanists interested in the Greek classics.⁶⁵

By the time of the fall of Constantinople Bessarion had established his ascendancy, both as a prince of the Church and as an intellectual and literary figure, which allowed him to influence opinion in Italy and beyond. His letter of 13 July 1453 to the Doge of Venice, Francesco Foscari, set the tone for one reaction to the fall of the city. It was a lament for the way 'the capital of all Greece, the splendour and ornament of the East, the Academy of the arts of civilization, the repository of all virtues, has been captured, despoiled, destroyed, and devastated by inhuman barbarians, by brutal enemies of the Christian faith, by the most ferocious of wild beasts'.⁶⁶ Bessarion became, as we shall see, a driving force behind the preparations made for a crusade to recover Constantinople. He became the hope and inspiration of those Greeks who believed that Byzantium 'might yet be free'. The arrival in 1460 of the Despot Thomas Palaiologos in Rome as a papal pensioner created the illusion of a Byzantine government in exile, with Bessarion as its spiritual leader. When Thomas died in 1465 he appointed the cardinal as guardian of his children. But by now Pope Pius II was dead; and the chances of mounting a successful crusade diminished. Bessarion directed his energies into another project, which was nothing less than the preservation of Byzantine civilisation, which had been dealt a near mortal blow by the sack of Constantinople.

He explained himself in a letter to Michael Apostoles: in the past he had not been over-concerned with the collection of Greek manuscripts. 'But when [Constantinople] fell, I conceived a great desire to acquire all these works not so much for myself . . . but for the sake of the Greeks who are left now, as well as for those who have a better fortune in the future . . . Otherwise, they would lose even these few vestiges of those excellent and divine authors which have been saved from what we have lost in the past, and they would differ in no way from barbarians and slaves.'⁶⁷ The loss of Constantinople meant among other things the dispersal – rather than the destruction – of collections of manuscripts, for the Turks understood their value, as the Brescian humanist Ubertino Puscolo discovered in the aftermath of the siege, which he had lived through. We find him acquiring manuscripts at Pera the moment he was released from Turkish captivity.⁶⁸ The same was true of Leonardo of Chios, though in his case he was trying to recover manuscripts plundered from the Franciscan library at Constantinople.⁶⁹

Paradoxically, it was a good time to be collecting Greek manuscripts. Bessarion was one of the beneficiaries. He drew up lists of manuscripts he wanted and had agents scouring the Ottoman Empire to procure them. He even sent his secretary on a mission to Trebizond to obtain manuscripts he wanted. Those he was unable to purchase he often had copied. He also had manuscripts in his possession copied. He did this partly as a precaution against loss and partly out of a desire to create a public library separate from his private collection.⁷⁰ This was at the heart of his plan to preserve the essentials of Byzantium in exile. He chose Venice as a permanent home for his library. There were sentimental reasons for this. When he first saw Venice in 1438 on the way to the council of Ferrara Florence, it struck him as another Constantinople. In 1463 he was sent as papal legate to Venice, where he was already enrolled in the *Libro d'Oro* – the Book of Nobility – and in the *Maggior Consiglio* in recognition of his services to the Serenissima. Bessarion appreciated the stability of the Venetian Republic. Only after long negotiations completed in 1468 was the Republic willing to take over responsibility for Bessarion's library, which consisted of no less than 472 manuscripts. Although it boasted very few rare authors, it included the essential texts, classical and Christian, which had helped to shape Byzantine civilisation over the centuries.⁷¹

It was not Bessarion's intention to pass on a dead civilisation. He wished to transmit a living tradition, which would make a special contribution to Christian culture by reconciling Greek and Latin differences. This was the purpose of his literary circle, which brought together Italian humanists and Byzantine scholars. Its early members included Poggio Bracciolini and Lorenzo Valla. On the Byzantine side there was Theodore Gazes, who had moved to

Italy in 1440. There was also George of Trebizond, who is hard to place, being Cretan by birth and Italian by education. The intensity of exchanges within the group could lead to violence, as on the occasion when George of Trebizond floored Poggio Bracciolini, who had taken exception to a comment George had made about him.⁷² This was one of the reasons why Bessarion fell out with George. Worse still for the latter's *amour propre* were Bessarion's criticisms of the standard of his translations from Greek into Latin. The cardinal felt that they were too literal and, adding insult to injury, commissioned new translations from George's rival, Theodore Gazes. Translation was a major concern of Bessarion's circle. The intention was to provide accurate, but not word for word, translations of the works of Plato and Aristotle to replace those inherited from the Middle Ages.⁷³

George of Trebizond ensured that the interest in Plato and Aristotle went much further than translation. In order to get his own back on Bessarion he attacked Theodore Gazes in a tract accusing the latter of misunderstanding Aristotle. But he went further than this by using it to accuse George Gemistos Plethon of paganism, a charge which was aimed directly at Bessarion, because he must have known of the latter's close links with his former teacher. He cannot have been unaware of the very public outpouring of grief which news of Plethon's death in 1452 had wrung from Bessarion. Whether George of Trebizond was aware of the future patriarch Gennadios's denunciation of Plethon's Platonism is less certain, but he will have heard the lectures on the differences between Plato and Aristotle which Plethon delivered at Florence in the course of the council of Ferrara Florence. George's intervention against Plethon had the effect of importing the last Byzantine intellectual controversy into an Italian setting.⁷⁴

George of Trebizond was an Aristotelian and more a scholastic than a humanist. He had no sympathy with Plethon's Platonism. But there was another dimension to his attack on Plethon. This was connected with the fall of Constantinople, which occurred less than a year after the latter's death. George believed that its underlying cause was the moral degeneracy produced by Plethon's paganism, which the last Byzantine emperor had supposedly espoused. It was his contention that, if allowed to infect the West, Plethon's ideas would sap the moral fibre of Latin Christianity. Such fears, we know, were groundless. We might dismiss George of Trebizond as a mischief-maker, were it not for the fact that he continued to peddle similar ideas for the remainder of his long life. George of Trebizond belonged with those men of learning who have in all ages believed that their erudition vouchsafed insights into the future and fitted them for the role of prophet. In George's case his prophetic gifts were, as we have seen, directed towards Mehmed II.⁷⁵

His introduction of unsubstantiated accusations did at least have the effect of relating an intellectual controversy over the relative merits of Plato and Aristotle to the political realities of the time. The fall of Constantinople and the intentions of the victorious sultan exercised the best minds of the day, but most deeply affected were those Greek exiles such as Bessarion. George of Trebizond gravitated to these circles, but he never properly belonged and remained an uncomfortable presence. His participation in the controversy over the differences between Plato and Aristotle was at one level just an attempt to attract attention. Apart from George the controversy was an entirely Byzantine affair, whether conducted around the future patriarch Gennadios or around Bessarion. Italian humanists looked on, but made no positive contribution. At this stage they did not know the works of Plato well enough. But the debate stimulated their interest in Plato. A younger generation around Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola set about the systematic translation of Plato's works into Latin. But the Plato they discovered was very different from the Plato discussed among the Greek exiles. What exercised these exiles was the question of whether it was Aristotle or Plato who had most nearly anticipated Christian teaching, but to Italian humanists this seemed an arid debate. Nor were they inspired by Plethon's call for a return to paganism. Instead, they responded to the metaphysical and mystical elements of Neoplatonism, which found an outlet in poetry and increasingly in magic.⁷⁶ In both Italy and Constantinople the controversy over the differences between Plato and Aristotle represented the last gasp of a distinctively Byzantine intellectual life. While in Constantinople conditions for the Greek community in the aftermath of the fall of the city were hardly conducive to the resumption of scholarly activities, in Italy the death of Cardinal Bessarion in 1472 only revealed how artificial the apparent intellectual vigour of his circle was.

Bessarion's attempt to transplant Byzantine civilisation to Renaissance Italy did not long survive his death. Italian humanists never showed very much interest in or comprehension of Byzantine civilisation. To their way of thinking its only value had been to preserve elements of classical Greece, which was where they sought their inspiration. At one level, Italian humanists understood that the major significance of the fall of Constantinople lay in the completion of the transfer of the classical Greek heritage into the safe-keeping of the West. Once this had happened, Byzantium became more or less irrelevant. Michael Apostoles pondered this and admitted that Italians were now pre-eminent, while the Greeks were just relicts, 'because in the cycle of civilization, which has a beginning, a middle and an end, the latter were in the closing stage of their culture, while the Italians were in the first phase'.⁷⁷

The refugee Greek scholars who had gathered around Bessarion became increasingly marginalised. Constantine Laskaris, author of a best-selling Greek grammar book, was among the more successful of their number, but even he ended his days at Messina in Sicily, far from the major centres of the Italian Renaissance. From there he surveyed the fate of other Greek scholars in the West. Theodore Gazes had died poverty-stricken at Policastro in southern Italy. Another member of Bessarion's circle, Andronikos Kallistos, sought his fortune teaching Greek in France and England. He died around 1476 in London, 'bereft of friends', as Constantine Laskaris put it. Even Constantine's master, John Argyropoulos, eked out a miserable existence in Rome, reduced every so often to selling a book, in order to get by. There is a large element here of exaggeration for the benefit of Constantine's young correspondent, who was advised of the benefits of mysticism when compared with the prospects of a scholar.⁷⁸

The Byzantine contribution to the Italian Renaissance was not negligible, but it had run its course by the end of the fifteenth century. Without Bessarion its impact would have been less marked. His immense prestige within the Roman Church made all the difference. After his death Greek scholars reverted to the teaching of Greek, and their most valued contributions were the Greek grammars they compiled. They acted as copyists and later as copy editors in the printing trade. They still had their part to play in the West's acquisition of Greek culture, but it was now a minor one and entirely on the West's own terms. Constantine Laskaris was complaining about the lack of status that Greek scholars enjoyed in Italy by the end of the fifteenth century. He connected this rightly or wrongly with the enslavement of their homeland. Echoing these sentiments around the same time was another Byzantine refugee, Michael Maroulles, but he did so in Latin and not in Greek.⁷⁹ He belonged to a generation born soon after the fall of Constantinople. His family managed to escape to Ragusa (Dubrovnik) and thence to Italy.⁸⁰ He made a living, like others of his generation, as a mercenary, but he was also a highly accomplished Latin poet. This brings us face to face with the process of cultural assimilation of a refugee community. It did not make him any the less conscious of his Byzantine inheritance. If anything, it intensified his sense of loss, which it would be easy to read into the moody expression revealed by his portrait by Sandro Botticelli.⁸¹ At the very least, it reveals how different the world he inhabited was from the one his parents had known in their youth. They were buried in the church of S. Domenico at Ancona along with his maternal grandfather and uncle. He supplied their tombs with elegant Latin epitaphs, which epitomised the naturalisation of a Byzantine family into an Italian setting.⁸²

VI

While Bessarion lived, Greek exiles in Italy had a focus. After his death only Anna Notaras, the daughter of the Grand Duke Loukas Notaras, had any real standing in the exile community.⁸³ Despatched to Rome at the beginning of the siege of Constantinople, she found protection with Gregory Melissenos, the refugee patriarch of Constantinople. The Notaras family had great wealth, some of which was in the safekeeping of Venetian and Genoese bankers. When news of the fall of Constantinople reached Venice and Genoa, their respective governments acted to protect the Notaras bank accounts.⁸⁴ Thanks to support from the Patriarch Gregory and Cardinal Isidore among others, Anna Notaras was able to secure control of her family's still considerable assets in Venice and Genoa. She used some of it to ransom her sisters, who came to join her in Rome. Their youngest brother Isaac later joined them, after escaping from Ottoman service, to which he had been consigned. Also in Anna's entourage were her niece Eudokia Kantakouzena⁸⁵ and the latter's husband Matthew Spandounes, who came from an Albanian family settled near the Venetian stronghold of Lepanto (Naupaktos). Their lives and those of their children illuminate some of the choices facing Byzantine aristocratic families following the fall of Constantinople.⁸⁶ Matthew Spandounes entered Venetian service and became a distinguished commander of the *stradioti*, the light cavalry of Greek and Albanian descent who formed an important arm of the Venetian forces. His children were born in Venice in the 1450s. His daughter married into the Trevisan family, but a very different fate awaited his sons Theodore and Alexander. They were sent to the Ottoman Empire for their education; to the court of their great-aunt Mara, the widow of Sultan Murad II. It was a matter of using family contacts at the Ottoman court to prepare Theodore and Alexander for the role of intermediaries between the Ottomans and Venice, which they duly carried out: Theodore as a diplomat and Alexander as a merchant at Constantinople. Several of their relatives held high office under Mehmed II, while another, Loukas Spandounes, was a very successful merchant at Thessaloniki. His tomb there in the Church of St Demetrios is emblematic of a family caught between East and West.⁸⁷ It is a Renaissance monument, a product of the same Venetian workshop which a few years earlier created the magnificent tomb in the Church of SS. Paolo and Giovanni at Venice for Doge Pietro Mocenigo (1474–76).⁸⁸ The Classical Greek lettering on Loukas's epitaph conforms to the highest Renaissance standards and owes absolutely nothing to Byzantium, even if it describes him as 'a scion of Byzantium and the Hellenes'.⁸⁹ His tomb brings a

touch of the Venetian Renaissance into the heart of an alien world, for the Church of St Demetrios was not only one of the greatest pilgrimage churches of the Orthodox World but was soon to be converted into a mosque. The example of the Spandounes family is a reminder that Byzantine aristocratic networks survived the fall of Constantinople. They adapted themselves to the realities of power and provided channels of communication between their new masters, but within a generation they were gone, the last vestiges of a disappearing order.

These aristocratic networks revolved around powerful women, such as Theodore Spandounes's two great-aunts on his mother's side, Mara, the widow of Murad II, and Anna Notaras. The former was widowed young and never remarried, but the favour of her stepson Mehmed II ensured great influence;⁹⁰ the latter never married, but she controlled her family's wealth and was responsible for numerous dependants. After Bessarion's death in 1472 she entered into an agreement with the Republic of Siena to take over a lordship in the Maremma, with a view to settling numbers of Greek refugees. It was a plan that came to nothing. By 1475 she had moved with her relatives and entourage to Venice. There she presided over the large Greek – mostly Cretan – community and attempted to obtain freedom of worship for the Orthodox. Although the Signoria agreed in principle, it only implemented the measure many years after her death in 1508. By far the most interesting connection Anna Notaras made, while in Venice, was with Nicholas Vlastos, who became her business factotum. He came from one of the leading Greek families of Crete. His grandfather had led the 1454 revolt against Venetian rule, which had as its aim reunification of the Orthodox under Ottoman hegemony. Nicholas was imprisoned for his part in the rebellion. Once released, he made his way to Venice, where he found a niche in the printing trade. He went into partnership with Zacharias Kallierges, the scion of another prominent Cretan family. Anna Notaras paid the costs of one of their earliest publications, the *Etymologicum Magnum*, which came out in July 1499. She therefore had an important role to play in the development of Venice as the major centre for the printing of Greek texts.⁹¹ But it was Cretans, not refugee scholars from Byzantium, who were the dominant force.

The fall of Constantinople appeared to usher in a flowering of Cretan culture in stark contrast to the disintegration of Byzantine civilisation. It is difficult to establish a direct connection between the two phenomena, given that the roots of the former with its blend of Byzantine and Italian elements go back to at least the late fourteenth century, when literary works in the Greek vernacular began to appear in Crete and Cretan artists started to make

a reputation for themselves. However, the fall of Constantinople affected Crete directly. Cretans were among the bravest of the city's defenders. The citizens of Candia, the capital of Venetian Crete, witnessed the arrival of survivors from the sack of Constantinople. Among the onlookers was the Venetian humanist Lauro Quirini, who in the previous year had retired to his family estates on Crete. He has left one of the earliest accounts of the fall of Constantinople based on the testimony of survivors. He emphasised the cultural loss. He had heard from Cardinal Isidore himself that 120,000 volumes had perished in the sack.⁹² He could hardly refrain from tears at the thought of the destruction of a literature 'which had cast its lustre over the whole world; which produced salutary laws, sacred philosophy and other excellent branches of learning, advantageous to human progress'.⁹³ This was the reaction of a highly educated Italian humanist, but the fall of Constantinople equally made an impression on the Greeks of Crete. The decoration of the church of St George at Apano Symi was finished in October 1453 and dated quite exceptionally by the fall of Constantinople.⁹⁴ It was a time of doubt and confusion for the Greeks of Crete. It produced, as we have seen, a rebellion against Venetian rule. Its aim was to secure the return of the Orthodox of Crete under the direct authority of the patriarchate of Constantinople, which in the circumstances would have meant submission to Ottoman rule. The Venetians put down the rebellion with some severity.

It was once these hopes engendered by the fall of Constantinople had proved to be illusory that the flowering of Cretan culture began. Characteristic was its religious art. Cretan painters already enjoyed some renown, but by the end of the fifteenth century they constituted one of the most prosperous groups within Greek society on the island. They organised themselves in Venetian style into a confraternity: the *Scuola di San Luca dei pittori*. Their products were in heavy demand from Flanders to the Balkans, Mount Athos and Constantinople. They were quite capable of tailoring their style of painting to their market. For the Orthodox they conformed to Byzantine norms; for Westerners they followed Gothic and later Renaissance conventions. It is therefore less surprising that a Cretan icon-painter called Domenikos Theotokopoulos (1541–1614) should become under the soubriquet of 'El Greco' one of the masters of European art. His older contemporary Michael Damaskenos also took the path to Venice, where he worked for nearly ten years in the 1570s, but he preferred to return to Crete. Whereas to succeed in the West 'El Greco' had effectively to abandon the artistic traditions of his youth, Damaskenos, in the same way as most other Cretan painters of the time, remained true to the Byzantine roots of his art. It was now an art reinvigorated and enriched by the influences of the Italian Renaissance.

In the aftermath of the fall of Constantinople Crete increasingly became a mediator between Renaissance Europe and the Orthodox Church, which was now under Ottoman hegemony. In the early sixteenth century the painter Theophanes the Cretan carried out extensive work in the monasteries of Mount Athos and Meteora. In good Byzantine fashion he later became a monk at the Lavra on Mount Athos. Crete also supplied the Orthodox Patriarchate of Constantinople with some of its most distinguished servants. This was in part because the Greeks of Crete had access to Venetian schools and the University of Padua. These provided educational opportunities which simply did not exist within the Ottoman Empire. Pre-eminent among these Cretans was the Patriarch Cyril Loukaris, who from the turn of the sixteenth century dominated the life of the Orthodox Church for nearly forty years. He was not simply the product of a Venetian educational system. He was also nurtured by a vigorous community, which could boast not only artists but also writers of considerable significance. The beginnings of a Cretan literature in the Greek vernacular go back to the late fourteenth century, but it was only in the late sixteenth century that it truly came of age with the works of George Chortatsis (1545–1610) and Vitsentzos Kornaros (1553–1613/14). Their masterpieces, the tragedy *Erophile* and the romance *Erotokritos*, were adaptations of Italian works, as was the anonymous religious drama, *the Sacrifice of Abraham*, which is often singled out as the most original contribution to Cretan literature. The last named transformed its lacklustre Italian model through its ability to infuse the biblical story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac with an immediacy which forced members of the audience to confront their own dilemmas. It would be pointless to pretend that there is anything obviously Byzantine about this. It is Renaissance literature, which is a judgement equally applicable to the works of Chortatsis and Kornaros. But, in the same way as Cretan art, it represented a radical reinvention of aspects of Byzantine civilisation, as it responded 'to a new and challenging set of conventions', in other words, those of the Italian Renaissance.⁹⁵ Such a development was more or less inconceivable while Constantinople stood. It corresponded, however, to the hopes expressed by Cardinal Bessarion – and before him by Manuel Chrysoloras – for a creative interaction between Greek and Latin cultures of the kind that, they believed, had underpinned the Roman Empire.⁹⁶ Both Chrysoloras and Bessarion were forced out of Byzantium and into exile because of their Latin sympathies. Their views did not enjoy any general support, because their openness to Latin ideas appeared to subvert the foundations of Byzantine civilisation, but they had glimpsed the possibility of a different kind of Byzantium. In ways that they could scarcely have apprehended, Renaissance Crete realised their dreams.

Notes

- 1 W.K. Hanak, 'Pope Nicholas V and the aborted crusade of 1452–1453 to rescue Constantinople from the Turks', *Byzantinoslavica*, 65 (2007), 337–59.
- 2 D. Romano, *The Likeness of Venice: A Life of Doge Francesco Foscari 1373–1457* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), 238.
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CHAPTER 5

The Russian reaction

I

Nonchalant is the way one historian has characterised the Russian attitude to the fall of Constantinople,¹ but this fails to do justice to the complexity of the Russian reaction. This stemmed from the distrust felt for the Byzantine emperor and patriarch in the wake of the council of Ferrara Florence, which came to be seen as a betrayal of Orthodoxy. However, it was impossible for Russians to be indifferent to the fate of Constantinople, because it was the religious centre to which over the centuries they had looked for guidance.² It was a place of pilgrimage, as the numerous late medieval pilgrim narratives attest.³ The pilgrims gravitated towards the shrines, relics and icons of Tsar'grad, as they called Constantinople. The emperor and his court scarcely figure in their narratives. The Russians showed very little interest in the Byzantine emperor. When at the end of the fourteenth century Vasilii I, Grand Prince of Moscow (1389–1425), informed the patriarch of Constantinople that 'we have a church, but no emperor', he was being realistic. The patriarch protested that however reduced the emperor's material circumstances might have become, he remained the God-given guarantor of the unity of the Orthodox faith. The Grand Prince appeared to give this claim grudging acceptance, though this may only reflect an improvement in relations with Byzantium secured through the good offices of the Greek archbishop of Russia, Photios (1408–31). In 1414 the Grand Prince's daughter Anna married John VIII Palaiologos, heir to the Byzantine throne. The relationship between the Grand Prince and the Byzantine imperial house was given visual form on Archbishop Photios's embroidered *sakkos* or episcopal tunic. This showed John VIII Palaiologos and his Russian empress facing the Grand Prince and his consort. A nimbus is used to underline the superior status of the Byzantine pair.⁴

Association with the Byzantine emperor may still have imparted a modicum of prestige, but its inconveniences became apparent after the death of Archbishop Photios. According to custom, whereby Greek alternated with Russian as archbishop of Russia, a Russian should have succeeded Photios, but the patriarch prevaricated. At last, in 1435 Grand Prince Vasiliï II (1425–62) had Iona (Jonah), bishop of Riazan', elected archbishop without first obtaining the approval of the patriarch, although he then sent him to Constantinople to receive the patriarch's blessing. Iona arrived to discover that there was a new archbishop of Russia in the shape of Isidore, the future cardinal. The patriarch had his own reasons for flouting convention: the forthcoming union council in Italy required that he had somebody he could trust in charge of the Russian Church, which was known to be suspicious of negotiations over the Union of Churches. Iona accepted the *fait accompli* and returned late in 1436 with the new archbishop to the Russian lands. Isidore stayed in Moscow just long enough to organise a delegation to the council, where he played a leading role in bringing about a Union of Churches, for which he received his cardinal's hat. Before returning to Moscow he spent nearly a year trying to implement the union in the regions dominated by the Lithuanians. Such activities aroused the suspicions of Russian prelates, who understood that a Union of Churches might well work to the advantage of the Lithuanians in their efforts to extend their control over Russian lands. The Russian Church united behind Iona, still bishop of Riazan', who was effectively at its head while Isidore was away at the council. The latter's proclamation of the Union of Churches in the cathedral of the Dormition at Moscow united the opposition against him. Doubts have been raised as to the truth of the story that the Grand Prince Vasiliï II had him confined in the Chudov monastery to await trial as a heretic. But it is difficult to see Isidore yielding to opposition within the Russian Church, unless it had the active support of the Grand Prince. What is certain is that the latter put no obstacles in the way of his return to Rome.⁵

The Grand Prince hoped that Iona, his original candidate as archbishop of Russia, would now receive the traditional blessing of the patriarch in Constantinople, but his letter to the patriarch was never sent, once it became clear that the new patriarch was as much a unionist as Isidore. These ecclesiastical complications helped to weaken the Grand Prince's political position. His cousin Dmitrii Shemiakha seized Moscow in 1446 and captured him, but thanks to, among other things, the support of the Russian Church led by Iona the situation was quickly reversed and Vasiliï II returned to power. One of his first actions was to have Iona elected once more archbishop of Russia. There remained the question of seeking Byzantine approval. Vasiliï II decided

to approach the Byzantine Emperor Constantine XI Palaiologos. He had a letter drafted, in which he announced the appointment of Iona as archbishop of Russia and explained that this had been done not out of arrogance, but out of necessity. As it happened, the letter was never sent for reasons that can only be guesswork, but it does contain a pointer. The Grand Prince believed that properly notification of the appointment should have gone to the patriarch, but 'he did not know whether there was a patriarch or not' at Constantinople.⁶ Such uncertainty reflects the state of doubt and distrust which characterised the Russian attitude to Byzantium on the eve of the fall of Constantinople. The union with Rome undermined Russian confidence in the Byzantine emperor as a guarantor of Orthodoxy, a role which, in a Russian context, the Russian Church increasingly looked to the Grand Prince of Moscow to perform. Vasilii II was hailed after the event for the way he had preserved the Russian people from Latin heresy.

In these circumstances, it was easy to accept that the fall of Constantinople was an object lesson in the fate of those betraying Orthodoxy. There was, however, a reluctance to put the blame directly on the Byzantine emperor. Instead, an anonymous Russian diatribe against the Latins dating to 1461 singled out Cardinal Isidore, the former archbishop of Russia, as the chief culprit for the fall of Constantinople. It accused him of having destroyed his faith, duped the Byzantine emperor and suborned the patriarch; all for the love of gold. By engineering the Union of Churches he had made inevitable the fall of the imperial city to the Turks, which was a punishment for lapsing into Latin heresy, but the author drew no conclusions as to its implications for the Russians.⁷ Archbishop Filipp of Novgorod was equally uncompromising. He told his flock in 1471 that 'the Greeks ruled an empire; the Greeks were famous for their piety; they united with Rome and they are now subject to the Turks'.⁸ It was, on the other hand, difficult to take any pleasure in the destruction of a polity which for so long had served as an exemplar. This will explain the muted reaction there was among the Russians to the fall of Constantinople. It came at a time when demands for ecclesiastical independence for the Russian Church were still taking shape. It forced Russian rulers and prelates to confront a question that in the past they had preferred to ignore. This became all the more necessary when in 1458, on the pretext of irregularities in Iona's installation as archbishop of all Russia and Kiev, the Lithuanian prince appointed in his place a supporter of union with Rome. His name was Grigor Bolgarin and he was to continue to trouble the Russian Church.⁹ Iona's defence of his legitimacy became the foundation of an independent Orthodox Church in Russia. He dismissed union with Rome as tantamount to apostasy. He maintained that it had led to the fall

of Constantinople, which was punishment for the betrayal of Orthodoxy at Florence. This meant that the Church in Russia had now to act without reference to Constantinople and was, in effect, independent. This was given concrete form when new bishops swore loyalty to the 'Holy cathedral church of the Holy Virgin in Moscow' rather than, as they had done in the past, to 'the Holy ecumenical apostolic church of the Holy Wisdom of God in the Imperial City'.¹⁰ At this point it made little difference that the Orthodox Patriarchate of Constantinople had been resurrected under Ottoman auspices. The Grand Prince of Moscow rejected any thought that the new patriarch might enjoy the right exercised by his predecessors to appoint to the archbishopric of Russia, giving as his grounds the patriarch's nomination by an infidel ruler.¹¹

II

How important a milestone the fall of Constantinople was for the Russians only became apparent in the course of the long reign of Ivan III (1462–1505), which established the pre-eminence of Moscow.¹² He effectively completed the gathering in of the Russian lands around Moscow with his annexation of Novgorod in 1478 and of Tver' in 1485. At the same time Moscow ceased to be a tributary of the Tatars. It became more outward looking. Playing a part in this was Ivan III's marriage in 1472 to Sophia Palaiologina, who was not only niece of the last Byzantine emperor but also came under the special protection of Cardinal Bessarion, who helped to negotiate the marriage. She brought with her a train of Italian and Greek followers, who offered the court of Ivan III a taste of Italian culture and Byzantine memories. The marriage helped to create the conditions for a proper assessment of the significance of the fall of Constantinople. To make good the lack of any detailed account of the event in Russian, Enea Silvio Piccolomini's narrative contained in his *Cosmographia* was translated into Russian.¹³ Its emphasis on cultural loss – on 'the second death of Homer and Plato' – might have appealed to those around Sophia Palaiologina, but would have been virtually incomprehensible to Russians. More popular was the translation from the Greek of John Eugenikos's *Monody* on the fall of Constantinople. This was completed as early as 1468, but where and in what circumstances are quite unknown. It owed its undoubted success in Russia to the renewed interest in Byzantium which developed in the course of Ivan III's reign. It was the inspiration of a Russian lament on the fall of Constantinople, which dates from the late fifteenth century. This uses John Eugenikos's device of the invocation of the sun in order to accentuate the scale of the disaster, which, following Eugenikos, is explained in terms of the Byzantine failure to repent, but there is a very

Russian twist at the end. It insisted that there was still a spark among the ashes, which would make possible the regeneration of Orthodoxy, for, while other Orthodox peoples had fallen under the yoke of the infidel, 'thanks to Divine Grace our Russian land . . . has been reinvigorated and exalted'. The lament closes by entreating Christ to allow the Russian land to flourish until the end of time. With these words it sets out for a Russian audience the true meaning of the fall of Constantinople: it prepared the way for the emergence of the Russian people as the champions of Orthodoxy.¹⁴

Dating from much the same time and developing very similar themes as the lament is the *Tale of the Conquest of Constantinople*.¹⁵ It is normally attributed to a Nestor Iskinder, who was, as we have already noted, present in the Turkish ranks at the fall of Constantinople. In a short autobiographical note appended to the *Tale* the author claimed to have made a written record of the actions accomplished by the Turks beneath the city's walls. But these notes – supposing that they survived – will only have provided a core, which he later embroidered, for the text that goes under his name preserves very little eyewitness testimony. Strangely for somebody who claimed to be serving in the Turkish ranks, the author writes almost entirely from the perspective of the defenders. As already noted, this has led Hanak and Philippides to put forward the hypothesis that he defected to the Byzantines and played an active role in the defence of Constantinople, but the passage they adduce in support of their views will not bear the full weight of meaning that they put on it.¹⁶ The only incident preserved in the text which bears the hallmarks of eyewitness testimony was Mehmed II's triumphal visit to St Sophia after the city had fallen.¹⁷ In other words, it is more than likely that he entered Constantinople with the victorious Turkish soldiery. It was then that he found time to talk to survivors about what had happened within the city. This would explain the text's double perspective. It might seem a little too trusting to accept on the basis of the autobiographical coda to the text that Nestor Iskinder was indeed the author of the piece, but it seems perfectly feasible, as long as it is understood that he must have been writing at some distance in time and in space from the event, almost certainly in a Russian monastery twenty or even thirty years later.¹⁸

The garbled character of the narrative suggests that it was largely done from memory. As it stands, it was a response to the awakening of interest among Russians in the fall of Constantinople and designed to put a Russian stamp on events. It is a work of high drama, which aims to recreate the atmosphere within the doomed city. Its narrative of the first Turkish assault is perhaps the most vivid description there is of the fighting along the walls of Constantinople, and it is equally graphic in its treatment of the religious processions

and litanies within Constantinople, which maintained the defenders' morale. Liberal use of direct speech heightens the tension. It quickly becomes clear that this is rather more a work of literature than eyewitness reporting. It is a tale built around two heroic figures: the Emperor Constantine XI Palaiologos and the Genoese *condottiere* Giovanni Longo Giustiniani. While the emperor organised the defence, holding councils of war in the forecourt of St Sophia, Giustiniani fought courageously along the walls, where he engaged in single combat with a stalwart of the janissaries, named for good measure Murad.¹⁹ On this occasion the defences held. The narrative draws out the ending with great skill. The first climax comes with the departure of Giustiniani from the fray. He was seriously wounded not once but twice. The first time he returned to his post, but wounded again was borne away by his troops, despite the emperor's entreaties. But all was not quite lost. The emperor succeeded in driving back the Turks. He was given a moment's respite, which he used to enter St Sophia and to beg God for forgiveness. Those in the church all prostrated themselves and then began to lift their voices to heaven until the church shook. The emperor left St Sophia, and with the words, 'Now is the time to win eternal glory for the Church of God and the Orthodox faith and to accomplish deeds of heroism, which will be remembered until the end of time'²⁰ went to his tragic death at the Golden Gate.

Nestor's *Tale* provides the most dramatic of the narratives of the fall of Constantinople. But it is scarcely historical. A patriarch who never existed, but who receives the name Athanasios, played an important role at the emperor's side.²¹ There is an equally unhistorical empress, who is supposed to have taken the veil the moment she took her leave of the emperor and to have got away to the Peloponnese on one of Giustiniani's ships.²² The need to introduce these characters should alert us to the way history is being turned into myth. The Emperor Constantine has become an Orthodox hero – a counterpoint to the first Constantine – who in an ideal world must have both an empress and a patriarch. Though Constantinople fell to the infidel, Orthodoxy in all its purity survived thanks to heroism of the emperor. The defence of Orthodoxy was now the responsibility of the Russians. This was the message of the concluding section of Nestor's account, which contains a tortuous unravelling of prophetic and apocalyptic texts.²³ However unhistorical this may seem, its purpose was to explain the relevance of the fall of Constantinople to Russia's destiny.

This was nothing less than its emancipation from Byzantine tutelage, which may now seem self-evident but was less obvious at the time, because of the nature of that tutelage. The ties binding Byzantium and the Rus' were cultural, spiritual and moral. Political power did not enter into the equation,

since the Byzantine emperor never exercised any direct authority over the Russian lands. But it is so much easier to sever political links than it is those more nebulous ties created by a shared faith. The Rus' must have derived some positive benefit from their Byzantine connection, otherwise it would not have lasted so long and letting go would not have been so difficult. What Byzantium offered the Rus' was authority and guidance in religious matters. This was of concern to the whole of society from the princely family to the peasantry, but it most directly affected the Church, which acted as the major unifying force operating among the Rus'. In theory, the princely family should have guaranteed political unity; in practice, its tradition of partible inheritance was a recipe for political fragmentation. The decision taken early in the fourteenth century to establish the seat of the Russian archbishop at Moscow was therefore of immense importance to its rulers.²⁴ However, should the archbishop become just a puppet of the princes of Moscow, he would lose his authority over the Russian Church at large. It was his appointment from Constantinople, whether he was a Russian or a Greek, which came to be seen as a guarantee of his independence of action. There was always the fear that, if this was curtailed, the Church would cease to function properly, which would in its turn entail the collapse of the Russian political system. From a modern perspective there does not seem to have been much order to the political arrangements of the Rus', but there was a framework of rules, which their leaders may not always have observed, but certainly understood. They also realised that in the last resort Byzantium acted as a guarantor of the moral and spiritual order. It is therefore easy to understand why the Rus' were so distressed by the apparent betrayal of Orthodoxy by the Byzantine emperor at the council of Ferrara Florence. It left them without guidance and authority. There was always the hope that the Byzantines would come to their senses and repudiate the union with Rome, but the Ottoman conquest intervened. The Rus' interpreted the fall of Constantinople as divine punishment for the Byzantine betrayal of Orthodoxy.

III

It was the end of a chapter and would eventually require explanations and rationalisations, which provided the Rus' with a clearer perspective on their historical role and sense of identity. It was much the same effect as that produced in the West, where the fall of Constantinople accelerated the emergence of the idea of Europe. But this was the work of men steeped in classical culture. They had no counterparts among the Rus', whose literary culture remained overwhelmingly monastic.²⁵ It consisted in the main of

liturgical books with a sprinkling of translations of edifying literature, which included sermons and saints' lives. There was a far greater preponderance of translations over original works produced in Rus', but Epifanii the Wise's life of St Sergii of Radonezh († 1392), written c. 1417–18, inaugurated a succession of Russian lives celebrating the achievements of contemporary monastic leaders. These emphasised the spiritual dominance they exercised within the Russian Church, which in turn underlines its strongly monastic character. It had responded to the monastic reform movement within Byzantium, which was centred on Mount Athos and often goes by the name of the hesychast movement.²⁶ However, the mysticism of Gregory Palamas, which was at its heart, was of very little interest to Russian monasticism. Although it was a period of renewed translation of Byzantine texts, there were no translations into Russian of Palamas's theological justifications of his mystical teachings. Rather the monastic revival in Byzantium went to strengthen the tradition of the common life in Russian monasteries. It was a time when monasteries were able to build up their estates, which made them among the most economically powerful forces within Rus'.²⁷ This was a pattern already apparent in Byzantine monasticism, where the monasteries of Mount Athos not only became the largest landowners in the Byzantine Empire, but also managed to retain the bulk of their estates and in some cases extend them in the face of the Ottoman advance. Russian monasticism looked to the monasteries of Mount Athos for guidance. While contact between the Russian ecclesiastical hierarchy and the patriarchate of Constantinople was severely limited, that between Russian monasteries and Mount Athos was unaffected by the fall of Constantinople, which meant that the Athonite monasteries continued to serve as a guide to monastic practice. The Athonite monastery of St Panteleimon remained in the hands of Russian monks and continued to prosper.²⁸

In the years after the fall of Constantinople it was the monasteries of Mount Athos, rather than the patriarchate of Constantinople, which were of real significance to the Rus'. As we have seen, the fall of Constantinople left the Holy Mountain untouched and, if anything, strengthened the position of its monasteries in relationship to the patriarchate. The combination of Athonite autonomy and a monastic ascendancy within the Russian Church helped to blunt the impact of the fall of Constantinople and to cushion the Rus' against its full significance. In any case, there was no Russian leader – lay or ecclesiastic – capable of articulating a positive response. The Grand Prince Vasilii II (1425–62) was still recovering from his confrontation with his cousin Dmitrii Shemiakha. He devoted the final years of his reign to ensuring the succession of his eldest son Ivan III (1462–1505). At the same time, the

metropolitan of Russia, Iona (1448–61), was facing a different challenge. It came from the Catholic ruler of Lithuania, Casimir, who in 1458 used the disputed legitimacy of Iona's appointment to impose his own nominee as archbishop of Kiev and all Russia. This opened up a distinct possibility that the Orthodox under Lithuanian rule would, in one way or another, accept the authority of Rome. In 1459 Iona wrote to them in the hope of strengthening them in their Orthodoxy. He admitted that Constantinople no longer guaranteed the integrity of the Orthodox Church. Instead, they would have to rely on the piety of the community of the faithful in the Russian land. It was an acknowledgement that the fall of Constantinople had dealt a serious blow to the reputation of Orthodoxy and that the Russian Church now stood alone.²⁹

It is highly unlikely that an awareness of the burden which the fall of Constantinople had placed on the Russian Church played a major role in the transformation of the principality of Moscow over the next fifty years. At the heart of the process was the 'gathering in of the Russian lands' by the princes of Moscow. Its roots can be traced back at least to 1326, when the metropolitan of the Russian Church fixed the seat of his authority in Moscow. However, it kept faltering. It was only under Ivan III that it became irreversible, but at his accession in 1462 the prospects for Muscovy did not look propitious. There remained the problem of the Tatars. The Golden Horde might no longer be the power it once was, but its khan continued to act as the arbiter of the politics of the principality, a role which devolved on his successor, the khan of the Great Horde. From the West the Grand Dukes of Lithuania continued to encroach on territories which once fell within Moscow's sphere of influence. It was a situation reminiscent of Byzantium in its closing years, when it was squeezed between Islam and the Latin West. However, by 1469 Ivan III had neutralised the threat from the Great Horde and was in a position to turn his attention to his western borders. He was at the same time searching for a new bride following the death of his first wife. He decided to explore the proposal, which had come from Cardinal Bessarion, that he marry the latter's ward, Sophia Palaiologina, the niece of the last emperor of Byzantium. These negotiations coincided with a deterioration of relations with the patriarchate of Constantinople. In 1469 Patriarch Dionysios I (1466–71) accused the Russian Church of lapsing into a state of schism, as a result of its failure to refer appointments to him for confirmation. In 1470 Ivan III admitted that this was indeed the case, for it was impossible for the Russian Church to accept the authority of the patriarch, since he was a creature of a Muslim ruler.³⁰ The patriarch's riposte was to welcome back into the Orthodox fold Grigor Bolgarin, the archbishop appointed by the prince

of Lithuania, and to recognise him as head of the Russian Church.³¹ This was a serious challenge to the authority of the Grand Prince, because he was also facing opposition from monastic circles headed by the formidable Abbot Pafnutii of Borovsk.³² They feared that an open break with the patriarchate of Constantinople was the first step towards increasing princely interference in ecclesiastical affairs.

Ivan III's negotiations with Rome at exactly this moment for a marriage with a Palaiologan princess cannot have been reassuring, for it must have been clear to all that a marriage into the Byzantine imperial family was no ordinary marriage. It would raise Ivan III far above the general run of Russian princes and reinforce his authority. Even more worrying was Sophia Palaiologina's position as a ward of a cardinal of the Roman Church, especially one with a Byzantine background. Did it mean that the marriage would lead to a rapprochement with the papacy? Also problematic were the bride's Italian connections. These pointed to a strengthening of ties with Italy, from where Ivan III already drew many of his experts. In other words, the marriage negotiations drew attention to the increased employment of Italians and other foreigners at the Muscovite court. Characteristically, Ivan III entrusted the details of these negotiations to his finance minister, Gian Battista della Volpe from Vicenza, who was first despatched to inspect the new bride and then in 1471 to collect her from Rome, where he acted as proxy for Ivan III in a marriage ceremony conducted by Pope Paul II. His failure to produce wedding rings nearly put an end to the proceedings.³³ His excuse was that an exchange of rings was not part of Orthodox ritual. This is not strictly true, but it is of less importance than the exchange of crowns, which has no place in any Latin marriage ceremony. Gian Battista was clearly carrying out instructions that on no account should any ceremony performed in Rome suggest that Ivan III tolerated Latin practices. The papacy expected Sophia Palaiologina to act as an agent of influence at the Muscovite court. Among her entourage was a papal emissary, who immediately became an object of suspicion. There were stories that he intended to enter Moscow bearing a Latin cross, a plan which he abandoned in the face of local indignation. The marriage was solemnised on the day of Sophia Palaiologina's arrival in Moscow (12 November 1472). The explanation for the haste was not the need to remove her as quickly as possible from her Catholic milieu, but the approach of the Nativity (or St Philip's) Fast, which begins on 15 November.

The influence exercised by Sophia over her husband and his court has always been a matter of debate. If her posthumous reputation is anything to go by, then she had an important part to play. She was supposed to have found the payment of tribute to the Tatars demeaning and urged Ivan III to

throw off the Tatar yoke. She even finds a place in the *Royal Book of Degrees* (*Stepennaia kniga*), a semi-official historical compilation of the mid-sixteenth century. It contains the story of the miraculous conception of her eldest son following a vision of St Sergii of Radonezh, while she was making a pilgrimage to his monastery of the Holy Trinity.³⁴ Otherwise, she gets rather a bad press. 'They say that she was a very artful woman, and had considerable influence on the actions of the Grand Prince.'³⁵ This is what Sigismund von Herberstein heard, when he was Habsburg ambassador to Moscow during the reign of her son Vasilii III (1505–33). It corresponds to a current of opinion circulating that she was instrumental in sowing discord in the Russian lands. She was painted as the wicked stepmother who had her stepson – the heir to throne – poisoned, so that her own son could take his place. A Greek émigré was told that, 'as soon as the Grand Princess Sophia came here with your Greeks, our land fell into confusion and great disorder, as with you in Tsar'grad'.³⁶ She was being blamed for introducing to Moscow the factionalism which Russians thought to have been a major factor in the fall of the Byzantine Empire. She did indeed bring with her a large number of Greek and Italian attendants. Among them were the founders of the aristocratic dynasty of the Trakhaniiots, the brothers George and Demetrios Tarchaneiiotes. They enjoyed the favour of Ivan III, who employed them on diplomatic missions to Italy. There were other Byzantine aristocrats – members of the Ralles family, for example – who had escaped from the fall of Constantinople to the safety of Moscow. Sophia Palaiologina's brother Andrew, the head of the imperial family, twice visited his sister in Moscow. He never stayed for long.³⁷ This reflected how few openings Greek exiles found at the Russian court, however distinguished their lineage. Their numbers did not match those of their counterparts in Italy. There was no call in Moscow for scholars to teach the rudiments of classical Greek. More surprising is the reluctance of members of the Byzantine clergy to look towards Moscow, but it is easy to see in retrospect that at this stage the Ottoman regime offered more lucrative opportunities. The Greeks around Sophia Palaiologina never had any decisive influence, but she was certainly a focus of resentment during the succession struggle at the end of Ivan III's reign.³⁸ It followed the sudden death in 1490 – blamed by some on Sophia Palaiologina – of Ivan the Young, the heir apparent to the Muscovite throne, who was Ivan III's eldest son from his first marriage, but his death did not guarantee the succession of Sophia's eldest son Vasilii, for the deceased had left a son Dmitrii, whom Ivan III favoured for the succession. It produced a very bitter struggle, from which Sophia Palaiologina emerged the victor in April 1502, when Ivan III confirmed that her son Vasilii was to be his successor. Sophia died a year later.

IV

Under the cover of a succession crisis the notion of Muscovy as a theocratic state began to take clearer shape. This was very largely a matter of responding to the needs and expectations of the Russian Church. It was not exactly a delayed reaction to the fall of Constantinople. It was more that at this juncture court circles in Moscow began to pay closer attention to the event, to judge by the appearance in quick succession of the translation into Russian of Pius II's short treatment of the event and of Nestor Iskinder's account. The sudden interest in the fall of Constantinople connects to the apocalyptic expectations surrounding the year 1492, which corresponds to the year 7000 from the creation in the Orthodox calendar.³⁹ With the words of the Psalmist in mind, 'For a thousand years in thy sight is but as yesterday', it was generally believed that just as it had taken seven days (or 7,000 years) to create the world, so the completion of a similar span of time would see its dissolution in preparation for the Last Judgement. There was a widespread assumption in monastic circles that the fall of Constantinople presaged these events.

There was, however, a group labelled by its opponents as 'Judaisers' who condemned such ideas as mere superstition. Their teachings are best characterised as anti-clerical. They reflect Western more than Jewish influence and were possibly of Hussite inspiration. The group never had a mass following and might well have disappeared after its condemnation in 1490 by a church council convened by Archbishop Gennadii of Novgorod, had not the succession crisis intervened. The 'Judaisers' found a patron in Elena of Moldavia, mother of the young Dmitrii, and a more reluctant protector in the Grand Prince himself.⁴⁰ What their various motives were are hard to fathom. Common sense suggests that they were connected with the struggle over the succession, which pitted Elena of Moldavia against Sophia Palaiologina. The 'Judaisers' advocated the expropriation of ecclesiastical property, which may have been a recommendation in some aristocratic circles. However, in the absence of hard evidence, it is better to treat their brief prominence on the political scene as a phenomenon connected with the ferment of ideas produced by the combination of a disputed succession and apocalyptic fears. The anticlericalism of the 'Judaisers' was an alien import, which called into question that deeply rooted amalgam of ideas and emotions known anachronistically as 'Holy Russia'.⁴¹ In retrospect, it may not seem to have been a serious challenge, but it was a reminder of the vulnerability of the Church, if the ruler failed in his duty of care.

Orchestrating the attack on the 'Judaisers' was the monastic leader Iosif Volotskii, abbot of Volokolamsk (1479–1515). He impressed upon the Grand

Prince of Moscow that it was his duty as a Christian ruler to extirpate heresy. In doing so he set out a political ideology which was entirely Byzantine in its inspiration. He lifted the notion that 'by nature the Emperor is like all men, but in his power he is like Almighty God' directly from Agapetos's *Chapters of Advice* addressed to Justinian I. He took over the Byzantine formulation that in normal circumstances the ruler could expect unquestioning obedience from his subjects by virtue of his God-given authority, but not if he failed to honour the responsibilities that came with it.

The interest in Byzantine political ideology is evident from new translations made from the late fifteenth century. These included a version of Agapetos's *Chapters of Advice* and the *Admonition of Basil I* addressed to his son Leo VI.⁴² Such texts had had very little relevance to a predominantly monastic literary culture. If they were known at all, it was in the form of extracts collected in pious compilations, such as *Melissa*. Political ideology, such as it was, consisted of little more than the intricacies of family rule. However, the rulers of Moscow had for two generations or more been attempting to escape from the restrictions that these imposed, but without a great deal of success. Paradoxically, it was their role as agents of the Tatar khan which had in the past placed them above their fellow princes. The gradual rejection of Tatar overlordship completed by 1480 meant that Ivan III had to rely on other sources of legitimisation. Byzantine ideas of a God-given authority exercised by the ruler had obvious attractions; not least the advantage of ecclesiastical support. However, it was internal developments within Muscovy which largely dictated the adoption of Byzantine political ideology. It was a direction that might well have been taken whether Constantinople had fallen or not.

This raises the problem of the ambivalent attitude of the Rus' towards its conquest by the Ottomans. Russian chronicles preferred to stress the council of Ferrara Florence as the decisive event emancipating the Russian Church from Byzantine control. It must be remembered though that there was a long history of Russian defiance of patriarchal authority followed by reconciliation. The steps being taken by the Grand Prince Vasili II to obtain recognition of the new archbishop Iona from Constantinople point in this direction. However, the fall of Constantinople made permanent what on past experience might only have been a temporary rupture.⁴³ This may have been of little immediate importance to the ruler, but it was another matter for the Russian Church, which was deprived of an ultimate authority and guarantor. Its leaders set about moulding the Grand Prince's authority in ways that would serve their needs. In doing so, they made use of Byzantine political ideology.

How far Sophia Palaiologina was involved in all this has been a matter of much speculation. It does seem most unlikely that she and her entourage

could have contributed very much to the process, since it seems to have been in the hands of ecclesiastical leaders, such as Iosif Volotskii. Sophia will have imbibed Byzantine traditions from her family background, but these will have been overlaid by her experience in Italy. It certainly does not mean that she had a mission to impose Byzantine practices on her husband's court. Like many another foreign princess, she exerted great influence in her new homeland, but this was because she respected and mastered the conventions and prejudices of her new surroundings. One reason for her success in bringing her eldest son Vasilii to power was the support she had from the Holy Trinity monastery, which was pre-eminent among the monastic establishments around Moscow. She adopted the founder of the monastery, St Sergii of Radonezh, as her special intercessor. She attributed the birth of her first child, Vasilii, in 1479 to the saint's miraculous intervention and brought the infant to the Holy Trinity monastery for baptism. In 1499 she presented this monastery with a liturgical cloth (*pelena*) of her own design in recognition of the aid it had given her.⁴⁴ Around a centrepiece showing an Orthodox cross, there are series of Church festivals and images of saints. There is nothing specifically Byzantine about the iconography. Scenes chosen from Scripture record the descent of the Holy Spirit. The bottom register contains scenes and figures of more contemporary significance. Reading from left to right they show the Russian archbishops St Peter and Alexis, who were adopted as special protectors of the ruling house of Moscow. There follows the appearance of the Virgin Mary to St Sergii of Radonezh; next to it that of the Archangel Gabriel to St Basil of Parion – a scene which at first sight seems quite out of keeping with the tenor of the piece. How can the appearance of the archangel to an obscure Byzantine saint of the iconoclastic era have any relevance in a Russian context? It does so by providing a pointed reference to Sophia's eldest son Vasilii or Basil, whose other name was Gabriel. But there is more to it than this: the scene suggests that Basil of Parion's defiance of the iconoclasts anticipated Vasilii's opposition to the 'Judaisers'. The importance of Vasilii to the iconography of the liturgical cloth emerges from the inscription, where he alone is named as co-ruler with his father Ivan III. Nothing is said about the latter's grandson, Dmitrii, who had been crowned co-ruler the previous year.

The purpose behind Sophia's gift of this liturgical cloth was to vindicate the claims of her son Vasilii as the legitimate successor of Ivan III. In the inscription she calls herself 'princess of the imperial city (*tsarevna tsaregorodskaja*)',⁴⁵ which suggests not only pride in her Byzantine origins but also an awareness of the leverage these gave her at the Russian court. They were an advantage in her struggle over the succession with Dmitrii's mother Elena, who was the daughter of a mere king of Moldavia. Sophia's gift to the monastery of the Holy

Trinity was a riposte to the gift of a liturgical apron (*podea*), which her rival had made to the cathedral of the Resurrection in the Kremlin. It was designed to celebrate Dmitrii's coronation.⁴⁶ The liturgical cloth showed a parade of the Hodegetria image, a scene originally used to illustrate the Akathistos hymn. Here it has been adapted to depict the Palm Sunday celebrations after Dmitrii's coronation. We see a newly crowned Dmitrii, flanked by his brother Vasilii and his grandfather Ivan III, escorting the Hodegetria image in the company of assembled court and ecclesiastical dignitaries. The image is borne aloft by one man wearing a complicated harness, which corresponds to descriptions of the parading of the Hodegetria image at Constantinople. What we see here are reminiscences of Byzantium being utilised for specifically Russian purposes. This contrasts with the subtler iconography which Sophia Palaiologina devised for her gift to the Holy Trinity monastery. Equally subtle was another gift which she made to the monastery. This was of an image of the Hodegetria.⁴⁷ The panel itself was new, very probably from the workshop of the famous Russian icon painter Dionisii (†1504), but it was made to fit a silver *revêtement* displaying portraits of the Grand Logothete Constantine Akropolites and his wife Maria, who were the donors of the original icon. Since it would have been almost as easy to melt down the silver and create a new *revêtement*, its Byzantine associations must have had their significance. As with her use of the title 'princess of the imperial city', Sophia intended them to serve as ammunition in her struggle to ensure the succession of her son. The power of Byzantine imagery is evident from Ivan III's decision in 1497 to adopt the emblem of the Palaiologan double-headed eagle on his seal.⁴⁸

Even if Sophia Palaiologina's gifts to the Holy Trinity monastery were designed to advance her son's claims to the succession, they show how attuned she had become to the politics of the Russian court. They also underline the renewed interest at the Muscovite court in Byzantium, which was part of the ferment of ideas produced at the turn of the fifteenth century under the twin pressures of apocalyptic expectations and a disputed succession. At last the Muscovite court and ecclesiastical leadership was able to ponder the significance for the Rus' of the fall of Constantinople. The conclusion was twofold: that Constantinople had ceased to be a sacred city and that the preservation of Orthodoxy had now become the responsibility of the Rus'. This did not mean recovering Constantinople for Orthodoxy. It was rather a matter of the Rus' becoming a new Israel, which would entail not only a reworking of Russian history but also the elaboration of a new concept of princely rule.⁴⁹ Personal authority was no longer enough, whether conferred by some foreign ruler or by virtue of dynastic descent, now that the prince had acquired onerous responsibilities before God; with its corollary that only

a ruler chosen by God was capable of carrying out such duties. To provide a closer definition of princely authority leaders of the Russian Church turned for guidance to Byzantine political ideology. Ihor Ševčenko has emphasised how important this was in shaping the Russian political system. In his words, 'the mould, once chosen, predetermines the form and the modes of expression of certain desires and beliefs to which a political system corresponds'.⁵⁰ But this does not alter the fact that Russian kingship differed markedly from its Byzantine counterpart, even if it used similar conceits in its elaboration. It was not possible to gainsay earlier developments, which are revealed by the Russian regalia. These consisted of the so-called cap of Monomakh and the *barmy*, which was a ceremonial collar. They are first attested under Prince Ivan Kalita of Moscow (1325–41). The cap is certainly of Mongol origin and very probably the *barmy* too. This should not come as any great surprise, because Ivan Kalita laid the foundations of Muscovy's future expansion by acting as an agent for the Tatar khan, who in return appointed him Grand Prince. By the time that Ivan III repudiated Tatar overlordship the cap and the collar had become so much part of the ritual of the inauguration of a Grand Prince that they could not be abandoned. In 1498 they played a central part in the coronation of Dmitrii, grandson of Ivan III, who first invested him with the *barmy* and then with the cap.⁵¹ But these acts were now inscribed within a religious setting, which placed special emphasis on Old Testament kingship. With the parallel of King David in mind, the Russian ruler was for the first time described as 'chosen of God'. This was in keeping with the emergence of the idea of Rus' as a new Israel. It was first made explicit in the letter which Archbishop Vassian Rylo of Rostov sent in 1480 to Ivan III on the eve of his confrontation with the Tatars on the River Ugra. He begged him 'to save us the New Israel, the Christian people, from this new Pharaoh'.⁵² That Ivan III responded to this current of thought is evident from the decoration of his new throne room in the Kremlin, the Golden Hall, which interweaves themes from Old Testament and Russian history.⁵³ This identification of the Rus' with Israel emerges after the fall of Constantinople, without it being possible to say that the one followed directly from the other. It was more that the fall of Constantinople allowed the Rus' to realise the potential, shared with almost every other Christian community, of identifying with Israel. Before 1453 the religious and political subordination of the Rus' meant that any such identification was superfluous. The claim advanced under Ivan III that the Rus' were the new Israel was only possible because of their emancipation from Byzantine and Tatar tutelage. The significance of the fall of Constantinople in a Russian context lies in the way that it focused attention on the role of the Rus' in a new dispensation.

V

It was not difficult for the Rus' to explain their election as a chosen people in terms of their history. Prefiguring the conversion of Vladimir to Orthodoxy was the mission of St Andrew to their ancestors. Vladimir himself was hailed as a new Constantine. Just as Constantine had opened up the possibility of the Romans becoming a new Israel and his city a new Jerusalem, so Vladimir had done the same for his people. This did not mean that it was their destiny to displace the Byzantines; rather that in altered circumstances they would have the responsibility of taking up the defence of Orthodoxy. But there was still a need, long after the event, for imperial approval. By the late fifteenth century the Rus' had concocted the legend of the Byzantine Emperor Constantine Monomachos (1042–55). Its historical basis was the marriage of his daughter into the Russian ruling family. She is supposed to have brought various wonderworking icons with her, including an image of the Hodegetria, which passed into the possession of the cathedral at Smolensk. She was also the mother of Vladimir Monomakh, one of the more impressive princes of Kiev. The adoption of his mother's name only underlines how important the Byzantine connection was. It was so important that by the end of the fifteenth century the Mongol cap used in the coronation ritual was known as the cap of Monomakh and explained as a gift from the Emperor Constantine: an explanation that bit by bit came to be applied to other items of regalia.⁵⁴ A fabricated Byzantine origin accorded so much better with the Christian foundations of princely rule than its authentic Mongol provenance. It also singled out the Kievan period as the formative stage in the creation of a Christian polity.⁵⁵ It fitted with a myth that after centuries of disruption Moscow was recovering its Kievan heritage. There is just a glimmer of historical truth in the sense that very few new materials were used at the end of the fifteenth century to elaborate the idea that Moscow was a new Israel. Compared with its Latin and Byzantine counterparts Russian culture was crude and unsophisticated. It was ignorant of the classics and its understanding of Christian thought was basic, but it was self-sustaining and had its own distinctive character, which would leave its mark on the political ideology it developed. It was far from being a carbon copy of a Byzantine model. However, Byzantium had acted for so long as an exemplar that there was a need to relate this idealised vision to developments within Rus'. The most authoritative statement came from Archbishop Zosima in the introduction to his Paschal Tables, drawn up in 1492, where he calls Ivan III 'ruler and autocrat of all Russia, the new tsar Constantine for the new city of Constantine – Moscow'.

The idea of the Russian ruler as a new Constantine was very ancient and went back to the conversion of Vladimir to Christianity, but to identify Moscow as the new city of Constantine was quite novel. It would not have been possible to do this before the fall of Constantinople to the Turks. But there is a more specific context. The fall of Constantinople intensified apocalyptic fears.⁵⁶ Many anticipated that 1492 would be the final year – the end of time. By drawing up Paschal Tables in that year Archbishop Zosima was affirming his confidence in the future, but it did not put a stop to apocalyptic expectations. It only deferred them; in conformity, however, to eschatological lore, which taught that a last emperor would bring to an end the chaos associated with the appearance of the Antichrist. This would then initiate a period of peace and prosperity, which would continue until the Last Judgement. How long exactly this would go on nobody was sure, but it did underline the need for a ruler capable of fulfilling the role of the last emperor, now that a Christian emperor no longer resided at Constantinople. The absence of a Christian emperor equally cast doubt on whether Constantinople would have a role in the final drama. However, just as there were ‘new Constantines’ so there could be ‘new cities of Constantine’. Under pressure from the differences of opinion produced by apocalyptic expectations, Archbishop Zosima was stating that the fall of Constantinople did not of itself presage the imminent end of the world, because the role played by the Byzantine emperor and by Constantinople in the cosmic cataclysm could be performed by others; in this case by the prince of the Rus’ and the city of Moscow.⁵⁷

Archbishop Zosima was not quite claiming that Ivan III had become a Byzantine autocrat, because the responsibilities of the Russian ruler related to his own people rather than possessing the ecumenical sweep attributed to Byzantine emperors. The first categorical statement of a *translatio imperii* comes rather later in a letter addressed by the monk Filofei to Vasili III and datable to around 1510.⁵⁸ It closes with the ringing words: ‘Two Romes have fallen and the third stands. A fourth there will not be. Another will not replace your Christian rule.’ The purpose of the letter was to complain about secular interference in ecclesiastical matters. The invocation of the three Romes was a means of reminding the Grand Prince of the nature of his authority and his responsibility towards the Church. It was not a programme of universal Empire. But it must in some sense have been a meditation on the fall of Constantinople, because it was an event about which Filofei went to considerable lengths to inform himself. The overthrow of the old order meant that the ruler of the Rus’ had a special duty to care for the well-being of the Church. This line of reasoning was not new, but instead of equating Constantinople with the new Jerusalem, in the way that Archbishop Zosima had done, Filofei identified it

with the new Rome. This had the effect of placing the destiny of the Rus' in an imperial rather than just a Christian context. Filofei's formulation had little impact at the time. It was only after the creation of the patriarchate of Moscow in 1589 that it gained general currency.⁵⁹

The immediate Russian reaction to the fall of Constantinople might indeed appear nonchalant. It was also severely practical. It meant establishing the independence of the Russian Church, which would lead in 1470 to a rupture with the restored patriarchate of Constantinople. It was at this point that the leaders of the Russian Church began to realise the full implications of the fall of Constantinople. They rationalised the position of the Rus' by identifying them as a new Israel, but this in turn had consequences for the role of the Grand Prince. He became a new David and thus his office acquired a sacral dimension, which it had not enjoyed under his predecessors. What this exactly meant became clearer at the very end of the century under the twin pressures of apocalyptic fears and a succession crisis. It was given ritual expression in the 1498 coronation of Dmitrii, grandson of Ivan III, where special emphasis was placed on the parallel with King David. However, there was another and just as apposite parallel: that used by Archbishop Zosima, when he called Ivan III a new Constantine. This was particularly apt, because not only did it link the Grand Prince with the original conversion of the Rus' to Christianity through another new Constantine, Vladimir, prince of Kiev, but it also evoked a Byzantine dimension, which styling Moscow the new city of Constantine made more explicit. It was never a matter of simply applying Byzantine norms, but the first detailed description of the authority of the Grand Prince has a distinctly Byzantine ring to it. It comes from the pen of one of the shrewdest foreign observers of the Rus', Sigismund von Herberstein, who twice served as Habsburg ambassador to Grand Prince Vasilii III, first in 1517–18 and then in 1526. He had the good fortune to be fluent in Slavonic and was therefore able to obtain a far more intimate knowledge of the Muscovite scene than was possible for those without his linguistic abilities. So he was able to record a popular saying of the time, 'God and the Grand Prince know', which was a stock response to the uncertainties of life. He writes of the authority of the Grand Prince in the following terms:

*He uses his authority as much over ecclesiastics as laymen, and holds unlimited sway over the lives and property of all his subjects: not one of his counsellors has sufficient authority to dare to oppose him, or even differ from him, on any subject. They openly confess that the will of the prince is the will of God, and that whatever the prince does he does by the will of God; on this account they call him God's key-bearer or chamberlain, and in short they believe that he is the executor of the divine will.*⁶⁰

Before a Christian ruler could exercise authority in this way, he normally went through some form of coronation. Yet Vasilii III was never crowned. Various explanations have been put forward. These centre on his usurpation of the throne from his rival Dmitrii, who had received a coronation. There was, in other words, uncertainty about the formal procedures to be followed. This reflects both diffidence and the difficulty of developing a new concept of princely authority with all its implications for the ordering of Church and society. It was not a matter of the imposition of a set of ideas borrowed from another polity, but using these ideas to give new meaning to traditional practice. It required a theorist of talent to provide definitive answers. He appeared in the shape of Makarii, metropolitan of Moscow (1542–63), who was able to rationalise existing developments through the clever fusion of Byzantine ritual and political ideology with Russian myth-making. Ivan IV (1533–84) was still a minor, when Makarii became metropolitan, but immediately the prince came of age in 1547 Makarii stage-managed his coronation, which was far more elaborate than that of 1498 for Dmitrii.⁶¹ It was based on a fourteenth-century Byzantine coronation order of ceremony kept in the metropolitan's archive. For the first time, following Byzantine convention the ceremony included anointing, which took place after the liturgy celebrated after the coronation. It was an act of appropriation of Byzantine political ideology and its accompanying ritual, but at each stage the participants insisted that they were acting according to ancient custom. Following Byzantine convention, Metropolitan Makarii insisted that it was consecration at his hands that raised Ivan IV to imperial status, but only as a complement to his 'primordial imperial heritage and ancestral right'. The metropolitan was making it quite clear that the new tsar was not usurping the role of a Byzantine emperor, but following in an ancient Russian tradition. There are elements of fiction, but these reflect how long the process of turning a Russian prince into an Orthodox emperor had taken. Its uncertainties and the diffidence shown are inseparable from the action of state building, which was going on simultaneously.

The 'gathering in' of the Russian lands was an erratic process. The critical moment at which it became irreversible did not occur until midway through Ivan III's reign. Thereafter a restatement of the nature of princely power became increasingly urgent, but this could not be divorced from the destiny of the Rus', which had been hanging fire ever since the fall of Constantinople. This had left them the only unconquered Orthodox people of more than local importance. The well-being of Orthodoxy was now their responsibility. Accounts of and laments for the fall of Constantinople always end with a prayer for the prosperity of the Rus', for they represented the future of Orthodoxy. It was in this way that the fall of Constantinople made its impact felt among the Rus'.

But in a sense Byzantium lived on in the shape of the revived patriarchate of Constantinople. It was difficult to shake off centuries of deference. In 1557 Ivan IV turned for confirmation of his imperial status to the patriarch of Constantinople. Equally, the Orthodox Patriarch of Constantinople, Jeremias II,⁶² was deeply involved in the elevation in 1589 of the Russian Church to patriarchal status. He even made the journey to Moscow, where he presided over the inauguration of the new patriarch. However, his decision to travel to Russia was witness to where the centre of gravity now lay within the Orthodox world. It was the end of a chapter that began with the fall of Constantinople. Once again, 1453 turns out to be an event, which forced a realisation of how much the world had changed rather than having very much direct influence on the way the world had changed. But indirectly it was a different matter. Byzantium continued to act as an exemplar. The Russian reaction to the fall of Constantinople demonstrates how much easier it was to absorb Byzantine influences, once Byzantium was no more.

Notes

- 1 M. Cherniavsky, 'The reception of the council of Florence in Moscow', *Church History*, 24 (1955), 354.
- 2 See D. Obolensky, 'Byzantium and Russia in the late Middle Ages', in J.R. Hale, J.R.L. Highfield and B. Smalley (eds), *Europe in the Late Middle Ages* (London: Faber & Faber, 1965), 248–75; id., *The Byzantine Commonwealth: Eastern Europe, 500–1453* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), 260–71; J. Shepard, 'The Byzantine Commonwealth, 1000–1550', in *Eastern Christianity*, 11–14, 41–52.
- 3 G.P. Majeska, *Russian Travelers to Constantinople in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* [Dumbarton Oaks Studies, 19] (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1984); id. 'Russian Pilgrims in Constantinople', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 56 (2002), 93–108.
- 4 D. Obolensky, 'Some notes concerning a Byzantine portrait of John VIII Palaeologus', *Eastern Churches Review*, 4 (1972), 141–6. Illustrated in Evans, *Byzantium: Faith and Power*, 299, fig. 10.6.
- 5 Fennell, *History of the Russian Church*, 170–88.
- 6 Obolensky, 'Byzantium and Russia', 269–72.
- 7 A.N. Popov, *Istoriko-literaturnyj obzor drevne-russkikh polemičeskikh sočinenij protiv latinjan (XI–XV v.)* (Moscow, 1875; reprinted London: Variorum 1972), 360–95, at 384–5.
- 8 I.M. Karamzin, *Istoria Godudarstva rossijskogo* (reprint: Moscow: Kniga, 1989), II = VI, [ch.1](#), col. 23.
- 9 Meyendorff, *Byzantium and the Rise of Russia*, 259.

- 10 Cherniavsky, 'The reception of the council of Florence', 355.
- 11 I. Ševčenko, 'Intellectual repercussions of the council of Florence', *Church History*, 24 (1955), 308–9.
- 12 J.L.I. Fennell, *Ivan the Great of Moscow* (London: Longman, 1963).
- 13 Unbegaun, 'Les relations vieux-russes', 31–5.
- 14 Pertusi, *La caduta di Costantinopoli*, II, 404–9; I. Ševčenko, 'Byzantium and the eastern Slavs after 1453', *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, 2 (1978), 7.
- 15 Pertusi, *La caduta di Costantinopoli*, I, 259–98; Nestor, *The Tale of Constantinople*; Unbegaun, 'Les relations vieux-russes', 13–31.
- 16 Nestor, §89.10–13. See Philippides and Hanak, *Siege and Fall*, 112–37.
- 17 Nestor, §82.6–7.
- 18 There is a Serbian translation of the text done in the late sixteenth century now preserved in the Athonite monastery of Hilandar. The translator explains the difficulties that he had in obtaining a copy of the text from Russia, which points to its place of origin. See W.K. Hanak, 'One source, two renditions: the tale of Constantinople and its fall in 1453', *Byzantinoslavica*, 62 (2004), 239–50.
- 19 Nestor, §39.4–8.
- 20 Nestor, §56.4–7. For the translation I have followed Pertusi, *La caduta di Costantinopoli*, I, 286.613–15.
- 21 Nestor, §67.19; §68.14; §81.16–19.
- 22 Ibid., §79.1–6; §83.1–5.
- 23 Ibid., §85–8.
- 24 Meyendorff, *Byzantium and the Rise of Russia*, 148–61.
- 25 But see D. Goldfrank, 'Essential glue: Muscovy's Republic of Sacred Letters, mid-XIV to mid-XVI centuries', *Forschungen zur osteuropäischen Geschichte*, 76 (2010), 335–9.
- 26 Meyendorff, *Byzantium and the Rise of Russia*, 96–118; J. Meyendorff, 'Is "Hesychasm" the right word? Remarks on religious ideology in the fourteenth century', in *Okeanos: Essays Presented to Ihor Ševčenko on his Sixtieth Birthday by his Colleagues and Students*, ed. C. Mango and O. Pritsak [Harvard Ukrainian Studies, 7] (Cambridge, Mass.: Ukrainian Research Institute, 1984), 441–57; P. Bushkovitch, 'The limits of Hesychasm: some notes on monastic spirituality in Russia 1350–1500', *Forschungen zur osteuropäischen Geschichte*, 38 (1986), 97–109; Shepard, 'The Byzantine Commonwealth', 36–41.
- 27 Fennell, *Russian Church*, 205–17.
- 28 B. de Kitrovo, *Itinéraires russes en Orient* [Société de l'Orient latin, 5] (Geneva: J.-G. Fick, 1889), 257–64; A. Soloviev, 'Histoire du monastère russe au Mont-Athos', *Byzantion*, 8 (1933), 228–30; *Actes de Saint-Pantélémon* [Archives de l'Athos, 12] (Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1982), 17.

- 29 Ševčenko, 'Intellectual repercussions of the council of Florence', 309.
- 30 E. Denisoff, 'Aux origines de l'église russe autocephale', *Revue des études slaves*, 23 (1947), 66–74.
- 31 Meyendorff, *Byzantium and the Rise of Russia*, 269–70.
- 32 G.P. Fedotov, *The Russian Religious Mind: II: The Middle Ages: The Thirteenth to the Fifteenth Centuries* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966), 285–301.
- 33 G. Barbieri, *Milano e Mosca nella politica del Rinascimento* (Bari: Adriatica Editrice, 1957), 28–9; R.M. Croskey, *Muscovite Diplomatic Practice in the Reign of Ivan III* (New York and London: Garland, 1987), 238–45; I. de Madariaga, *Ivan the Terrible: The First Tsar of Russia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 17–19.
- 34 D.B. Miller, 'The cult of Saint Sergius of Radonezh and its political uses', *Slavic Review*, 52 (1993), 680–99.
- 35 Sigismund von Herberstein, *Notes upon Russia: being a translation of the earliest account of that country*, transl. R.H. Major [Hakluyt Society, 10] (London: Hakluyt Society, 1851), 21.
- 36 Quoted in De Madariaga, *Ivan the Terrible*, 18–19.
- 37 G. Alef, *Rulers and Nobles in Fifteenth-Century Moscow* (London: Variorum, 1983), no. XI; R.M. Croskey, 'Byzantine Greeks in late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Russia', in L. Clucas (ed.), *The Byzantine Legacy in Eastern Europe* [Eastern European Monographs, 230] (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 33–56.
- 38 J.L.I. Fennell, 'The dynastic crisis 1497–1502', *Slavonic and East European Review*, 39 (1960–1), 1–23; J.V.A. Fine, Jr., 'The Muscovite dynastic crisis of 1497–1502', *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, 8 (1966), 198–215; G.P. Majeska, 'The Moscow coronation of 1498 reconsidered', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 26 (1978), 353–61.
- 39 M.S. Flier, 'Till the end of time: the Apocalypse in Russian historical experience before 1500', in V.A. Kivelson and R.H. Green (eds), *Orthodox Russia: Belief and Practice under the Tsars* (University Park: PENN, 2003), 127–58.
- 40 J.L.I. Fennell, 'The attitude of the Josephians and the Trans-Volga Elders to the heresy of the Judaisers', *Slavonic and East European Review*, 29 (1950–1), 486–509; J.S. Luria, 'Unresolved issues in the history of the ideological movements of the late fifteenth century', in H. Birnbaum and M.S. Flier (eds), *Medieval Russian Culture* [Californian Slavic Studies, 12] (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 150–71; J.D. Klier, 'Judaizing without Jews? Moscow-Novgorod, 1470–1504', in A.M. Kleimola and G.D. Lenhoff (eds), *Culture and Identity in Muscovy, 1359–1584* [UCLA Slavic Studies, n.s. 3] (Moscow: ITZ-Garant, 1997), 336–49.
- 41 S. Dixon, 'How holy was Holy Russia? Rediscovering Russian religion', in G. Hosking and R. Service (eds), *Reinterpreting Russia* (London: Arnold, 1999), 21–39.

- 42 I. Ševčenko, 'A neglected Byzantine source of Muscovite political ideology', *Harvard Slavic Studies*, 2 (1954), 141–79; id., 'Agapetus East and West: the fate of a Byzantine "Mirror of Princes"', *Revue des études sud-est européennes*, 16 (1970), 3–44.
- 43 Alef, *Rulers and Nobles in Fifteenth-Century Moscow*, no. III.
- 44 I. Thyrt, '“Blessed is the Tsaritsa's womb”: the myth of miraculous birth and royal motherhood in Muscovite Russia', *Russian Review*, 53 (1994), 479–96, at 48–4; id., *Between God and Tsar: Religious Symbolism and the Royal Women of Muscovite Russia* (Dekalb, Ill.: North Illinois University Press, 2001), 22–5.
- 45 Thyrt, 'Blessed is the Tsaritsa's womb', 480.
- 46 Evans, *Byzantium: Faith and Power*, no. 195, 322–3; R. Cormack and M. Vassilaki, *Byzantium 330–1453* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2008), no. 266, 448. A *podea* was a cloth suspended beneath an icon.
- 47 Evans, *Byzantium: Faith and Power*, no. 4, 28–30.
- 48 See G. Alef, 'The adoption of the Muscovite two-headed eagle: a discordant view', *Speculum*, 41 (1966), 1–21; Shepard, 'The Byzantine Commonwealth', 8–9. Though the occasion for its adoption was a diplomatic exchange with the Habsburg Emperor Maximilian, the iconography is entirely Byzantine.
- 49 J. Raba, 'Moscow – the Third Rome or the New Jerusalem', *Forschungen zur osteuropäischen Geschichte*, 50 (1995), 297–307; D.B. Rowland, 'Moscow – the Third Rome or the New Israel', *Russian Review*, 55 (1996), 591–614.
- 50 I. Ševčenko, 'Neglected Byzantine source', 177.
- 51 von Herberstein, *Notes upon Russia*, 39–44; M.S. Flier, 'Political ideas and rituals', in M. Perrie (ed.), *Cambridge History of Russia: I – From Early Rus' to 1689* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 397–401.
- 52 Raba, 'Moscow – the Third Rome or the New Jerusalem', 301. Cf. D. Ostrowski, *Muscovy and the Mongols: Cross-Cultural Influences on the Steppe Frontier, 1304–1589* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 164–5.
- 53 D. Rowland, 'Muscovy', in H.A. Lloyd, G. Burgess and S. Hodson (eds), *European Political Thought 1450–1700: Religion, Law and Philosophy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 267–99, at 270–6.
- 54 M. Cherniavsky, 'Khan or Basileus: an aspect of Russian medieval political theory', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 20 (1959), 459–76; Ostrowski, *Muscovy and the Mongols*, 164–98, esp. 171–7.
- 55 J. Pelenski, 'The emergence of the Muscovite claims to the Byzantine-Kievan "imperial inheritance"', in *Okeanos*, 520–31.
- 56 Flier, 'Till the end of time', 127–58.
- 57 Cf. F. Dvornik, 'Byzantium, Muscovite autocracy and the Church', in A.H. Armstrong and E.J.B. Fry (eds), *Rediscovering Eastern Christendom: Essays in Commemoration of Dom Bede Winslow* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1963), 106–18.

- 58 N. Andreyev, 'Filofey and his epistle to Ivan Vasil'yevich', *Slavonic and East European Review*, 38 (1959), 1–31; D.W. Treadgold, 'The meeting of Moscow and Rome in the reign of Vasilij III', in A. Blane (ed.), *Russia and Orthodoxy, II: Essays in Honor of Georges Florovsky* [Slavistic Printings & Reprintings, 260/2] (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1975), 68–72.
- 59 Rowland, 'Moscow – the Third Rome or the New Israel?'; D. Ostrowski, '“Moscow the Third Rome” as historical ghost', in S.T. Brookes (ed.), *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261–1557): Perspectives on Late Byzantine Art and Culture* (New York and New Haven: Metropolitan Museum of Art and Yale University Press, 2006), 170–9.
- 60 von Herberstein, *Notes upon Russia*, 32.
- 61 D.B. Miller, 'The coronation of Ivan IV of Moscow', *Jahrbuch für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 15 (1967), 559–74.
- 62 S. Runciman, 'Patriarch Jeremias II and the patriarchate of Moscow', in G.D. Dragas (ed.), *AKSUM-THYATEIRA. A Festschrift for Archbishop Methodios of Thyateira and Great Britain* (London: Thyateira House, 1985), 235–40.

CHAPTER 6

The Ottoman reaction

I

The conquest of Constantinople is arguably the single most important event in Ottoman history, but this is scarcely the impression left by Ottoman historians. The first Ottoman historians of the conquest, Tursun Beg, Neshri and Ashikpashazade, are non-committal. It was not until the end of the sixteenth century that the conquest came to be seen as a landmark in the forward march of the Ottoman Empire. The problem was in part a historiographical one. With one or two exceptions early Ottoman historical writing was at a rudimentary state of development.¹ It was only in the course of the sixteenth century that a school of Ottoman historians emerged, which was at least the equal of its counterparts elsewhere. These Ottoman historians were able to fit the conquest of Constantinople into a coherent narrative of the history of the Ottoman dynasty.² This was less easy to do nearer the event itself, which appeared to call into question some of the fundamentals of the Ottoman enterprise, as it had hitherto existed. It revived the misgivings produced by the ambitions of Yildirim Bayezid (1389–1402). His victory over the crusaders at the battle of Nikopolis in 1396 confirmed the Ottoman hold on its Balkan conquests. It pointed the way to the transformation of a loose collection of frontier territories and warlords into an Islamic Empire. Posing as successor to the Seljuqs of Rum, who had ruled over Anatolia in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Bayezid set about the systematic annexation of their territories. This made the conquest of Constantinople all the more urgent on a number of counts. It fitted with a belief that this had been the ultimate goal of the Seljuqs; it would help to unify Bayezid's European and Anatolian territories but most of all, it would provide a fitting capital for a new imperial power. As it turned out, Bayezid's plans were no more than a mirage, but one that continued to haunt the Ottomans.

The expansion of Ottoman territories in Anatolia affronted the Mongol dynast Tamerlane, who had claims over the Seljuq lands. He accused Bayezid of neglecting the Ottomans' mission to expand the frontiers of Islam through holy war. He marched westwards and in 1402 caught Bayezid near the city of Ankara. The Ottomans were completely defeated and Bayezid was led away into captivity. For nearly twenty years there was turmoil, as Bayezid's sons fought to establish their superiority.³ Ottoman historians dubbed it *Fetret Devri* or Time of Troubles and laid the blame on Bayezid's megalomania. They dismissed his dreams of an empire centring on Constantinople as a corollary of his profligate lifestyle, encouraged, they believed, by his Christian companions. Bayezid, it seemed, was in danger of adopting an infidel way of life. He had forgotten that the destiny of the house of Osman was to lead the *ghaza* or holy war against the infidels, not to fraternise with them. There was an abiding fear that the conquest of Constantinople would lead either to the absorption of the Ottomans into a Christian framework or, at best, to a dilution of their Islamic zeal.

In the aftermath of Bayezid's overthrow, devotion to the holy war became the official ideology of the Ottoman dynasty, but it was holy war directed towards the subjugation of the Balkans. It seems not to have had the conquest of Constantinople as an immediate goal, almost certainly because of its association with Bayezid's ambitions. If his grandson Murad II (1421–51) laid siege to Constantinople in 1422, he withdrew after the failure of a single full-scale assault. In retrospect, it looked more like a demonstration designed to warn the Byzantine emperor against interfering in Ottoman dynastic affairs than a serious effort to conquer the city. Murad II was not able to resolve a contradiction at the heart of the Ottoman regime. The conquest of Constantinople may have been its ultimate goal, but the ideology of holy war also sanctioned a structure of power, in which the Ottoman ruler presided over – rather than dominated – a loose alliance of warlords and heads of powerful families. The conquest of Constantinople threatened this balance of interests, for it raised the spectre of an all-powerful sovereign, who appropriated the traditions of an imperial city and distanced himself from his people. Murad II was always very careful to present himself as a ruler in the traditional Ottoman mould. He respected the autonomy of the warlords and worked through the old families of Anatolia. Court life remained simple and Murad II made a point of being accessible to petitioners. His delight in the pleasures of wine and young boys only added to the traditional image of a ruler, for these were an established part of a princely lifestyle. Above all, he was true to the *ghazi* ideal. His major achievement at the end of his life was to hold the Danube frontier against sustained pressure from the Hungarians.

But Murad II's careful maintenance of a traditional image masked important changes which were taking place in the structure of Ottoman government. The power and range of the so-called slave institution increased markedly under him. It was not just a matter of the growing size of the slave army of janissaries. The regularisation of the *devşirme* or child-tribute put recruitment on a systematic basis. This was only part of the elaboration of the machinery of government, which in the usual way required increasing numbers of administrators. On the fiscal side these were drawn to a large extent from Greeks and Italians; on the secretarial side from the sultan's slaves.⁴ These developments altered the nature of the authority exercised by the Ottoman ruler, even if Murad II was reluctant to admit it.

These structural changes are likely to have been the underlying cause of the political turmoil occasioned by Murad II's abdication early in 1444 in favour of his son Mehmed II. Contemporaries explained this unexpected step in entirely personal terms: they believed that it stemmed from the sultan's remorse at the elimination of his son and heir Alaeddin Ali Çelebi in 1443, in which he must have been complicit. Like so much else that was happening at the Ottoman court at the time this episode remains mysterious, but it reveals a vicious succession struggle, from which the young Mehmed emerged victorious.⁵ Since he was scarcely more than thirteen, he is unlikely to have initiated the coup which brought him to power. We have to look for the men who were using him. They were drawn in the main from those slave administrators who were becoming an increasingly powerful force in the Ottoman system of government, men such as the future Grand Vezir Mahmud Pasha,⁶ although, since the latter was still comparatively young, he is unlikely to have been the driving force behind Mehmed II's rise to power. A more plausible candidate was Zaganos Pasha, a Christian renegade from Albania, who became Grand Vezir immediately after the conquest of Constantinople. He was of humble origin, unlike Mahmud Pasha, who came from the notable Serbian family of the Angelović and was a great grandson of Caesar Alexios Angelos Philanthropenos, the ruler of Thessaly in the late fourteenth century. This lineage connected him to all the great Byzantine families, while his brother Michael Angelović quickly became a leading figure at the Serbian court and a spokesman for subservience to the Ottomans. Mahmud Pasha had fallen into Turkish hands in 1427 as a young boy and had been brought up as a page at the Ottoman court. He was at the centre of a network of slave administrators, but he also maintained links with men of influence at the different Christian courts, Byzantine and Slav. It was part of the way the Christian elites were being drawn into the Ottoman fold long before the final fall of Constantinople.

The impetus behind the conquest of Constantinople came very largely from these converts to Islam, who came to dominate the Ottoman administration. Why their ambitions centred on Constantinople in this way remains a matter of speculation. It may only have been the need for some signal victory which would confirm their hold on power, to which end they fed the young Mehmed II with dreams of glory. It may also have been in opposition to Murad II's Grand Vezir Çandarlı Halil Pasha, who in 1446 thwarted their attempts to put Mehmed II on the throne. Halil Pasha represented the forces of conservatism at the Ottoman court. He strove to preserve the old arrangements, which balanced the interests of ruler, warlords and old Anatolian families, such as his own. He also supported entente between the Ottomans and the Byzantines, because, as we have seen, an independent Constantinople played a vital part in ensuring the effective functioning of the Ottoman system. Halil Pasha had no objection to disciplining a useful client and understood the value of demonstrations against Constantinople, like that of 1422, but he had no interest in the conquest of Constantinople. In this he represented Ottoman opinion, which displayed little enthusiasm for an attack on Constantinople. So entrenched was his position that he remained Grand Vezir when Mehmed II finally became sultan in 1451 on the death of his father. But this was another reason why the conquest of Constantinople was so important to the men around Mehmed II. It would be a way of breaking the ascendancy exercised by Çandarlı Halil Pasha, which was the major obstacle in the way of securing power. A struggle for power can only have been part of it. It is also clear that the young Mehmed had a vision of his imperial destiny, which his entourage will have encouraged.⁷

II

So far, we have been dealing in the balance of probabilities, for lack of hard evidence about the aspirations and motivations of those around Mehmed II. There is, however, one document which offers a solid basis for discussion. It comes in the shape of the letter addressed to Mehmed II by Sheikh Akshemseddin, who was the leading preacher in the Ottoman camp.⁸ The occasion was the crisis of confidence which followed the successful breaking of the Ottoman blockade on 20 April 1453 by ships bringing relief to Constantinople. The preacher seems to have been suspicious of the sultan's resolve. Though unwilling to impugn his ruler's faith, he made it clear that he did not believe that there was a sufficiently deep commitment to Islam for the siege to succeed. He had no trust in an army which, he claimed, was largely composed of Christian renegades. This was of course an exaggeration.

The janissaries may have formed a *corps d'élite*, but they constituted a relatively small part of the Ottoman forces. It is much more likely that the sheikh had in mind the chief Ottoman commanders: men such as Mahmud Pasha, Zaganos Pasha and Ishak Pasha, all of whom had a Christian background and were the driving force behind the siege of Constantinople. Akshemseddin had his suspicions about the whole operation. It was not being undertaken in a properly Islamic spirit. The sheikh revealed the depth of his misgivings only after the conquest of Constantinople, when he refused Mehmed II's invitation to take over a religious foundation just outside the city walls. He preferred to return to his *tekke* in Asia Minor. As Akshemseddin explained to his son, Constantinople deprived him of his spiritual inspiration, which immediately returned once he had crossed to Asia Minor.⁹ This reflected a deep suspicion of Constantinople among the religious, which only disappeared very slowly, as the meaning of the conquest of Constantinople became clearer.

By then Akshemseddin appears transformed into the spiritual inspiration behind the undertaking. This had no historical basis, for he clearly disapproved both of the spirit in which the siege was launched and of Mehmed II's decision to turn Constantinople into his new capital. He disapproved, in other words, of the young sultan's imperial ambitions, which to his way of thinking had been nurtured by Christian renegades. Even so, it remains surprising that the conquest of Constantinople should have occasioned such disquiet, given that a famous hadith of the Prophet singled out the conquest of Constantinople as a sacred duty for his followers. But the hadith – 'They shall conquer Qostantiniya. Glory be to the prince and to the army that shall achieve it' – seems not to have had any prominent role in the Ottoman propaganda at the time of the siege. The justification for laying siege to Constantinople was much more the failure of the Byzantine emperor to honour his obligations to the Ottoman ruler.¹⁰

Only after the event, almost certainly to deflect the kind of criticism levelled at him by Akshemseddin, did Mehmed II seek to present his conquest as the culmination of a Muslim enterprise, which had begun with the Umayyad siege of Constantinople of 674–78. It was still remembered most vividly by Muslims as the occasion of the voluntary martyrdom of Abu Ayyub al-Ansari, the Prophet's standard-bearer. His tomb just inside the walls not far from the Golden Horn was throughout the Middle Ages an object of pilgrimage for Muslim visitors to Constantinople. In the aftermath of the conquest two distinct traditions about the site of Abu Ayyub's burial place started to circulate. Both revolved around Akshemseddin. The first is that at a difficult moment in the siege the sheikh was able to lift morale by locating the burial place at a spot overlooking the Golden Horn, a mile or so outside the walls. The second

tradition has Mehmed II entering Constantinople and asking Akshemseddin to point out the tomb of Abu Ayyub, which he duly did in its traditional place just inside the walls of Constantinople. The strange thing is that Mehmed II seems to have ignored the original tomb in favour of the new site outside the city walls, where in 1457 he granted land to one of his vezirs for the erection of a convent; two years later he took direct control of the project, adding a mosque and a mausoleum (or *türbe*).¹¹ It was this complex which Akshemseddin refused to take over. This suggests that he was opposed to the sultan's attempt to appropriate the cult of Abu Ayyub. In other words, he was contesting Mehmed II's presentation of his conquest of Constantinople as part of a great Muslim enterprise. He saw it more as an act of self-glorification on the part of the sultan.

III

This conflict over the shrine of Abu Ayyub al-Ansari is symptomatic of a deep division of opinion in Ottoman circles over the conquest of Constantinople, of which the early histories offer two quite distinct interpretations. The first is that given by Tursun Beg in his *Life of Mehmed the Conqueror* – the *Tarikh-i Ab'ul-Fath*.¹² While other Ottoman historians understood that the conquest was part of a dynastic enterprise, Tursun preferred to see it as Mehmed II's personal achievement. He was present at the conquest of Constantinople and was at times at the sultan's side, which is not a surprise because he came from a prominent Ottoman family with a long history of distinguished military service. His own career was on the administrative side. He belonged to the highest ranks of the secretariat. He seems to have written his history in the late 1480s and to have presented it to the new sultan Bayezid II (1481–1512). If his intention was to glorify the deeds of the Conqueror and to offer his style of rule as a model for future Ottoman sultans to follow, it had to be done in a way that appealed to the new sultan, who was notoriously disapproving of his father's way of life. Tursun Beg's *History* was accordingly low key. It presented the conquest of Constantinople as a reward for Mehmed II's piety. The *History* is a personal memoir designed to protect the Conqueror's memory. However diffidently it reflects ideas circulating among those close to the sultan.¹³

To others it looked as though the conquest of Constantinople had the paradoxical effect of increasing the influence of Christians at the Ottoman court. The historian Ashikpashazade made a villain out of Rum Mehmed Pasha, who was a Greek captured in 1453. He converted to Islam and entered Ottoman service, where he did so well that by 1468 he had become Grand Vezir. Ashikpashazade claimed that as Grand Vezir Rum Mehmed Pasha did

all he could to harm Muslims, as a way of avenging the fall of the city.¹⁴ He believed that Mehmed Pasha's Christian relatives encouraged him to use the favour he enjoyed with the sultan to stop Turkish settlement in Constantinople, so that the Greeks remained the dominant element. To that end the Grand Vezir imposed ground rents on incomers to Constantinople. Ashikpashazade suggested that the sultan allowed himself to be so dominated by his Grand Vezir that his every word became law. Needless to say, this is far from the truth. The Grand Vezir's actions were more a reflection of the way the character of the sultan's authority was changing. It was becoming more autocratic; more reliant on members of his slave household, who often had a Christian background. It was easy to connect changes in the style of government with the move of the capital to Constantinople from Edirne, which only confirmed old suspicions about Constantinople.

In other words, the changing character of government coloured assessments of the conquest of Constantinople. Tursun Beg was an insider and an apologist both for the conquest of Constantinople and Mehmed II's regime, unlike other contemporary or near-contemporary Turkish historians. We are mainly dealing with anonymous chronicles, but these underpinned the more ambitious historical works of Ashikpashazade and Neshri,¹⁵ both of which were written for Sultan Bayezid II (1481–1512) and completed at roughly the same time as Tursun Beg's *Life* in the late 1480s. Their backgrounds were very different from that of Tursun Beg. Neshri tells us almost nothing about his life. He came from Bursa and was a member of the *'ulema*. Ashikpashazade is more forthcoming. He came from a family of mystics and dervishes, who claimed Baba Ilyas – a famous dervish of the thirteenth century – as their ancestor. With their contempt for the infidel and their devotion to the Ottoman dynasty they were exactly the people who made possible the rise of the Ottoman Empire. Ashikpashazade was born in 1392/93 near Amasya. He became a dervish and participated as a ghazi (warrior) in the campaigns that brought the Balkans under Ottoman rule. He is likely to have had a role in the conquest of Constantinople; and quite an important one at that to judge by the substantial properties he acquired in Constantinople and Galata,¹⁶ which calls to mind a saying of the time recorded by his fellow historian Neshri. It went, 'You must have been at the sack of Constantinople', and was directed at anybody getting rich quickly.¹⁷ Ashikpashazade was not opposed to the conquest of Constantinople, but to the changes that followed in its wake, which threatened to undermine ghazi and dervish influence. He was conscious that he was living at the end of a heroic period and he did not want the achievements and exploits of past generations forgotten. He duly recorded them, but in such a way that they became a critique of Mehmed II's extension

of the power of the state and with it the influence of the slave institution. Both Ashikpashazade and Neshri objected to the way that the conquest of Constantinople was being used to justify Mehmed II's imperial design. Instead they emphasised the essential contribution of the ghazis and the dervishes to the fall of the city. If it was a triumph for Mehmed II, it was not a personal but a dynastic one. Ashikpashazade underlined this in his description of the Friday prayers held in St Sophia, which were the culmination of the conquest. The *khutba* was read out in the name not only of Mehmed II but also of all his predecessors.¹⁸ Both Neshri and Ashikpashazade understood that the prayers of the dervishes, rather than the piety of the sultan, had at moments of crisis swayed the outcome in favour of the Ottomans. It was a way of pretending that the conquest of Constantinople had not changed the essentials of the Ottoman enterprise, when of course it had. It was part of a struggle over the future shape of the Ottoman Empire. Around Mehmed II there fused a new vision of the Ottoman destiny as a world power, which is reflected in the pages of Tursun Beg. Neshri and Ashikpashazade, for their part, represented conservative opinion, which was still tied to the notion of the ghazi state. They wrote their histories partly in the hope that they might help to persuade Bayezid II to abandon some of his father's measures. The conquest of Constantinople remained a deeply contentious issue throughout the reign of Mehmed II.

IV

It is unlikely that, to begin with, Mehmed II had any very clear idea what he would do with his conquest. At first he listened to the suggestion, which is most likely to have come from his Grand Vezir Çandarlı Halil Pasha, that Constantinople should retain its autonomy with the Grand Duke Loukas Notaras as governor of the city.¹⁹ The intention behind this plan was to change existing arrangements as little as possible. It did not envisage turning Constantinople into the Ottoman capital. Such an outcome would have been a victory for Halil Pasha and a defeat for those around Mehmed II, who refused to let this happen. First, they had the Grand Duke executed, but only after he had implicated the Grand Vezir, who was put to death in his turn. The leading member of the group, Zaganos Pasha, became the new Grand Vezir and sealed the hold on power exercised by members of the slave institution, but with one important qualification: whereas before the conquest of Constantinople they had groomed Mehmed II for their own purposes, thereafter the sultan was in complete command. Conquest was the psychological crucible, which transformed him almost overnight from inexperienced youth to autocrat.

The reconfiguration of the Ottoman enterprise in the years after 1453 was in the final analysis the work of Mehmed II. The chance survival of an album of his schoolwork leaves no doubt about his intellectual potential and the breadth of his interests.²⁰ The future shape of the Ottoman Empire was always going to depend on whether or not Mehmed decided to move his capital from Edirne to Constantinople. It was not a decision he found easy to make and he took his time. His immediate concern was to ensure that Constantinople could withstand any western counterattack. He had the walls of the city repaired. He ordered the construction of a fortress known as the Seven Towers (*Yedi Kule*) at the Golden Gate, which had once been the ceremonial entrance into the city.²¹ He also appointed a governor of Constantinople with a remit to bring in new settlers.²² But there were other measures, which suggested longer-term thinking. He ordered the creation of a palace in the centre of the city around the old Forum of Theodosius. It was not fortified but with its pavilions and kiosks set in parkland was more a 'pleasure dome'. It was an earnest that he would keep a residence in Constantinople; not that it was going to become his capital.²³ Of greater importance for the future was his decision taken in the autumn of 1453 to make George Scholarios patriarch of Constantinople, but his immediate concern was to bring order to Constantinople, which was in a state of near anarchy. Assigning the new patriarch the church of the Holy Apostles with its associations with the Emperor Constantine the Great suggests that Mehmed II was not yet thinking of turning Constantinople into an imperial capital, even if he soon thought better of it and moved the patriarchate to the Pammakaristos monastery, which occupied a far less prominent site.²⁴ He made a brief visit to Constantinople in the autumn of 1455 to inspect that work was being carried out properly. He now ordered the construction of a great covered market (*bedesten*), together with a number of caravanserais, along with the renovation of the *Embolos*, which had been the main commercial centre of the Byzantine city. He also embarked on the colossal project of restoring Constantinople's water supply, which had been neglected over the centuries.²⁵ These were important practical steps towards the making of a new capital. However, it was not until 1458 that he took the decision to clear the site of the church of the Holy Apostles and build his own mosque.²⁶ At the same time, he began work on the New or Top Kapi palace.²⁷

It was at this point that Mehmed II made clear his intention to turn Constantinople into his capital at the expense of Edirne. One of the attractions of building a mosque on the site of the church of the Holy Apostles was the latter's foundation by the Emperor Constantine. It allowed Mehmed II to proclaim that he was presiding over a new dispensation, while the creation of

a new palace revealed that the original palace no longer matched his concept of imperial power. Unlike the Top Kapi, the old palace did not dominate the city and was designed more for relaxation than for the exercise of authority. For the site of his new palace Mehmed personally chose the Akropolis of the old city, rather than the Great Palace of the Byzantine emperors. He would not in any case have wanted his seat of power tainted with Byzantine associations, but the great recommendation of the site chosen was the magnificence of its location. It occupied one of the commanding heights of the city, which had the additional advantage of being situated at the tip of a promontory jutting out into the Golden Horn and thus standing apart from the rest of the city. It provided a splendid vantage point with its views over the Golden Horn and the entrance to the Bosphorus with the city spreading out in front of it. In the words of Tursun Beg, 'facing Galata the site [of the New Palace] overlooked the burial place of Abu Ayyub, the companion of the prophet, as well as the harbour installations, the arsenal and the whole port; to say nothing of two continents and two seas'.²⁸ Mehmed II spent the whole winter of 1458/59 in Constantinople, the first time that he had done this. He took personal charge of building operations in the city. It was the moment he made up his mind to turn Constantinople into his capital. He intended it to be an expression of his imperial vision.

V

It was in its essentials Islamic, but there was no escaping the weight of history or Constantinople's symbolic significance. Mehmed II's decision to move his capital to Constantinople was a momentous step, because it was the first time that an ancient capital had become the centre of an Islamic state. The early Muslim conquerors preferred Kufa to Ktesiphon, Damascus to Antioch, Cairo to Alexandria, and Kairouan to Carthage. The old associations were suspect; and so they were with Constantinople, but this did not deter Mehmed II, though, as we have seen, it took him several years finally to decide that Constantinople was to be his new capital. In the absence of direct evidence we can only guess what special attractions Constantinople had for its conqueror. The inscription over the main gateway into the Top Kapi Palace suggests that what most appealed to Mehmed II was Constantinople's reputation as a seat of world-empire. It was set up in 1478 and records the construction of the palace 'by the command of the Sultan of two continents and the emperor of two seas, the shadow of God in this world and the next, the favourite of God on the two Horizons, ruler of land and sea, the conqueror of the city of Constantinople, the father of conquest Sultan Mehmed Khan'.²⁹ This was

a claim to have recreated the old Byzantine Empire in an Islamic form. His annexation of the Peloponnese in 1460 followed by his conquest of Trebizond in 1461 snuffed out any alternative centres of Byzantine legitimacy. Their rulers were brought on sufferance to the Ottoman court.

Mehmed II fixed his eyes not on the paltry remains that he conquered in 1453, but on the great Empire created by Constantine, Theodosius and Justinian. This is what he wished to emulate. In the second court of his new palace he displayed porphyry sarcophagi from the church of the Holy Apostles and the monastery of the Pantokrator, together with the great equestrian statue of Justinian, which had originally stood to the side of St Sophia, and other early Byzantine spolia, including the pedestals of the monument to Porphyrios the charioteer.³⁰ It was a collection which reflected a very complicated attitude to the Byzantine past. It was part triumphalist and part admiring. In some ways, it compares with the conqueror's collection of Christian relics, which was to cause his son Bayezid II such embarrassment.³¹ These presumably came into his possession as part of his share of the plunder made during the sack of Constantinople and may conceivably have been the imperial relic collection. It was another memento of his triumph. But there may have been a little more to it than this. There is a story that Mehmed II reproved his librarian for his lack of respect, when he wanted to use an item from the collection – the stone of the nativity – as a stool to retrieve a manuscript which was just out of reach.³² *Ben trovato* or not this suggests a genuine interest in Christianity. To go with his relic collection the conqueror commissioned a Madonna and Child from Gentile Bellini, when the artist was staying at Constantinople in 1479/80.³³ He did not forget that many – perhaps a majority – of his subjects were Christian. He added to his titles that of *Kayser-i Rum*, which proclaimed to his Christian subjects that he was the successor of the emperors of Byzantium.³⁴

A glance at the products of Mehmed II's Greek scriptorium provides insights into his efforts to comprehend his Byzantine inheritance.³⁵ He may have known some vernacular Greek, but literary texts would have been beyond him. This was no bar to a lively curiosity about the classical past. After Mehmed II had visited Troy in 1462, he commissioned a copy of the *Iliad* from John Dokeianos, an accomplished Greek scholar who had followed his master, the Despot Demetrios Palaiologos, to the Ottoman court. Mehmed II's interest in Alexander the Great explains the copy of Arrian's *Anabasis* made by his Greek scriptorium. Complementing this was Kritoboulos's *Life of the Conqueror*, which was equally a product of the Greek scriptorium. It presented Mehmed II as a latter-day Alexander. Its treatment of the rebuilding of Constantinople had echoes of Alexander's foundation of Alexandria.

In 1474 another Greek scholar, Michael Aichmalotis, produced a version of the *Story of the Building of St Sophia* for Mehmed II. It was subsequently translated into Turkish and Persian.³⁶ It testifies to the conqueror's intense interest in the early history and monuments of Constantinople, which is equally apparent in his decision not to destroy the column of Theodosios, despite its inclusion within the precinct of the Old Palace. Once again Bayezid II found his father's enthusiasm for the past an embarrassment. He had the column pulled down to make way for a bathhouse.³⁷

Mehmed II's interests did not, however, extend to later Byzantine history, although two items produced by his scriptorium suggest that he tried to keep abreast of developments within the Orthodox Church, for which he had a certain responsibility once he had re-established the patriarchate. The first was a Greek translation of works by Thomas Aquinas, which had found its way into the Vatican library by 1475. This may have been produced as a favour to the Patriarch Gennadios, who, we know, had an abiding interest in Thomas Aquinas.³⁸ The second is even more surprising: a translation into Arabic of portions of Plethon's *Laws*.³⁹ The translator made it clear that the remainder had been burnt. This opens up the possibility that Mehmed II intended the translation for members of the *'ulema*, so that he could have their opinion on the Patriarch Gennadios's decision to have the original Greek text burnt. It is not being suggested for a moment that Mehmed II would ever have looked at these manuscripts, but he wanted them to be available for the experts advising him on religious matters. He was more interested in the sciences.⁴⁰ Ptolemy features prominently. There is a Greek manuscript of his *Geography* (now in Venice), which contains a portrait of Mehmed II's first wife Sitt Hatun together with another of her brother, Melik Arslan, who in 1454 became lord of Malatya in eastern Anatolia. The chances are that it was a gift to Mehmed II either on the occasion of his marriage to Sitt Hatun in September 1450 or more probably after the conquest of Constantinople, when Ptolemy's *Geography* would have made a fitting offering to a world-conqueror.⁴¹ It may or may not have been the volume which Mehmed II studied with George Amiroutzes in the summer of 1465. To facilitate study he had a wall map made of Ptolemy's *mappa mundi*, but with Arabic place names instead of Greek.⁴² This engagement with Ptolemy fits with Mehmed II's general interest in the classical roots of Byzantine culture, rather than in Byzantine culture for its own sake.

VI

Surprisingly, Mehmed II appears to have done little to encourage historians. This was left to his Grand Vezir Mahmud Pasha, who was in many ways the

architect of the Ottoman Empire which emerged after the conquest of Constantinople. He was Grand Vezir from 1456 until 1468 and then again from 1472 to 1473. Setbacks during an expedition to shore up the Anatolian frontiers of the Empire provided Mehmed II with a pretext for his dismissal and then in 1474 his execution. Besides being a great general and a successful administrator, Mahmud Pasha also made a major contribution to the transformation of Constantinople into an Ottoman capital.⁴³ His mosque was completed in 1463, the earliest large mosque to be built in Constantinople under Ottoman auspices. To it he attached a charitable institution and in 1473 – fortuitously – a *türbe*, which would serve as his last resting place. It was situated close to the covered market – the *bedesten*. He also built an inn or *han* for visiting merchants. His palace was close to the walls of the Top Kapi Palace. It was around complexes of this kind that the new city emerged out of the old. The population of these new quarters was largely Turkish, but Mahmud Pasha also maintained close contact with the Greek community, which was re-establishing itself in the north-eastern corner of the city along the Golden Horn, in the area commonly known as Phanari. He did this, for example, by bringing his mother, who was still a Christian, from Serbia and in 1463 assigning her as a residence the monastery of the Prodomos in Petra, which was situated in the area.⁴⁴ It was a way not only of caring for his Christian dependants but also of restoring a monastery which had been plundered by the janissaries during the sack of Constantinople.⁴⁵ Mahmud Pasha was much closer to the realities of rebuilding Constantinople than his master.

He would also exert more influence on how things were remembered. This he did through his patronage and encouragement of men of letters. He was a man of great culture and under the name Ademi a poet himself. He commissioned a world history in Persian from Shükürrullah Rumi which was completed by 1459. Its purpose was to place the Ottomans in the context of Islamic history. It goes no further than the accession of Mehmed II.⁴⁶ It was also for Mahmud Pasha that Enveri wrote his *Düsturname*, which he completed in 1464.⁴⁷ In a short closing section devoted to recent Ottoman history the spotlight is on Mahmud Pasha rather than Mehmed II. The bulk of the work is devoted to Umur Pasha, the emir of Aydin, who in the mid-fourteenth century terrorised the Aegean. If his career had little or nothing to do with the Ottomans, it had more relevance for Mahmud Pasha, for whom it was almost family history. One of his distant ancestors makes an appearance in the work at the side of the usurper John Kantakouzenos,⁴⁸ whose bid for the Byzantine throne depended very heavily on Umur Pasha's support. Their alliance provided the unifying theme of the work. The emphasis is on cooperation between Greek and Turk, which was something that Mahmud

Pasha worked for, as a basis for the new regime that he was endeavouring to create. Since Enveri was writing at a time when Mahmud Pasha was in command of the Ottoman fleet, it would have been difficult to ignore the parallels between Umur's naval victories and those of Mahmud Pasha. There is very little in Enveri and nothing in Shükrullah about the conquest of Constantinople. As we have seen, it was not until after Mehmed II's death that Ottoman historians felt free to write about the conquest of Constantinople, which remained a contentious issue, as much for the changes it initiated in the style of government as the conquest itself.

Mahmud Pasha's posthumous influence is apparent in Tursun Beg's *Life of the Conqueror*, in which Mahmud Pasha has almost as prominent a role as Mehmed II himself. This is easily explained by the twelve years that Tursun Beg passed in Mahmud's service. His deep respect for his master's role in the creation of the Ottoman Empire shaped his presentation of Mehmed II's achievements. Mahmud Pasha was also a highly regarded presence in the Greek histories of Laonikos Khalkokondyles and Michael Kritoboulos. Though we cannot be sure that there were any direct contacts between the two Greek historians and Mahmud Pasha, their excellent information about the affairs of the Ottoman court derived, if not from Mahmud Pasha himself, then from members of his circle. Khalkokondyles knew, for instance, that the first Ottoman governor of Mistra was in his service.⁴⁹ Kritoboulos provides an admiring description of the mosque which Mahmud Pasha built in Constantinople.⁵⁰ Both present Ottoman rule as a force for good, enshrined in Mahmud Pasha's generosity and good sense. In some ways he was the presiding spirit of the new regime. In the opinion of Khalkokondyles he excelled in power and might all previous Ottoman Grand Vezirs. He does full justice to his leading role in the Ottoman conquest of Mistra and Trebizond. This completed the gathering in of the Greek lands under Ottoman dominion, which in his eccentric way Khalkokondyles saw as a first step in the liberation of the Hellenic spirit from its Byzantine carapace. Kritoboulos provides a more measured assessment of the Ottoman conquest, but it is one shot through with his admiration for Mahmud Pasha. In this and in other respects there are marked similarities between his treatment of the Ottoman conquest and that of Tursun Beg, for both historians believed that it was to the advantage of Christians to submit to the Ottoman sultan, who would guarantee their protection. From all that we know about the Ottoman court under Mehmed II, it was Mahmud Pasha who pressed for an entente between Ottoman and Christian.

Kritoboulos applauded Mahmud Pasha's contribution to the rebuilding of Constantinople, but he was not the only one of Mehmed II's ministers

to involve themselves in this project. Rum Mehmed Pasha made himself responsible, not so much for Constantinople, but its Anatolian suburb of Üsküdar, where he built a mosque complex and a covered market. But his palace was in Constantinople and he had public baths built in the Unkapani quarter by the Golden Horn.⁵¹ The construction of public baths was a remarkable feature of the earliest phase of the rebuilding of Constantinople. The few bathhouses in the late Byzantine city were attached either to the houses of the rich or to monasteries and charitable institutions. This reflected the parlous state of Constantinople's water supply, which never recovered from its neglect during the period of Latin rule. This helps to explain not just the decline in the size of Constantinople's population, but also its concentration in a relatively small section of the city between St Sophia and the Golden Horn, where the water supply was still fairly reliable. Lack of water may also help to explain why the efforts made immediately after the conquest of the city to bring in settlers were a failure. In 1455, as we have seen, Mehmed II gave orders for the repair of Constantinople's water supply. It was a gargantuan task, but once completed the repopulation of the city went ahead in earnest. The establishment of public baths was part of the creation of the necessary infrastructure for the expansion of the city. Though only marginal to Byzantine culture in its final stages, baths had from the end of the fourteenth century become a central feature of Ottoman urban life. Several of Mehmed II's vezirs founded public baths in Constantinople, even when their main building efforts were concentrated in other cities. It was perhaps the most practical way of attracting settlers to Constantinople. It was also paradoxically a good advertisement for the Ottoman way of life!⁵²

VII

Mehmed II acted in the belief that God had given him the task of creating Constantinople afresh.⁵³ He had no interest in reviving the Byzantine city, only in creating something new. In this he was ably assisted by his vezirs, the majority of whom were of Christian origin, men such as Hass Murad Pasha, a scion of the house of Palaiologos. There was deep suspicion, as we have seen, in some sections of Ottoman society of the motivation of these Christian renegades, who still maintained ties with their families. This was increased by a policy of settling Greeks from the Peloponnese and from Trebizond in Constantinople.⁵⁴ It looked to some as though the new Constantinople might be little different from the old. Greeks did form a significant part of the population: around a third towards the end of the conqueror's reign. It was, however, easy to lose sight of the rather larger influx of Muslim settlers.

The problem was not so much the conquest of Constantinople as its appropriation. With its weight of history and symbolic significance it threatened to alter the Ottoman enterprise out of all recognition. There was no disguising the delight that Mehmed II took in aspects of his Byzantine inheritance. It was evident in his treatment of St Sophia. The climax of the conquest was the celebration of Friday prayers within St Sophia, now converted into a mosque. He protected it against looters; he made sure that its mosaics – ‘his jewels’ – were preserved. A veil was placed over the image of the Mother of God in the apse. If some of the mosaics were whitewashed over, others were still visible in the seventeenth century. The Conqueror’s original intention was to make St Sophia the major mosque of the city. He endowed it with most of the urban property which he appropriated after the conquest. Its incomes were expected to support a religious school and other charitable institutions established in former monasteries. Mehmed II’s privileging of St Sophia was an interim measure, which reflected uncertainty about his plans for Constantinople.⁵⁵ It was only in 1458 that he decided to make it his capital. This not only entailed the creation of a new palace, but also a new mosque on the site of the church of the Holy Apostles.⁵⁶ Work began in 1463 on the construction of the new mosque, which is usually known as the Fatih Camii. St Sophia was demoted and its endowments diverted to the new foundation, which was on a massive scale. The mosque stood at the centre of a vast precinct and was flanked by schools and charitable institutions. Both the planning of the precinct and the architecture of the mosque have attracted considerable attention. Because the precinct is strangely reminiscent of the Ospedale Maggiore at Milan, it is assumed that Italian architects must have been involved in the planning. Certainly, Filarete, the architect of the Ospedale Maggiore, had plans to visit Constantinople, but there is nothing to suggest that they ever came to anything. It is far more likely that the whole complex was the responsibility of Atik Sinan, the chief architect of the mosque. There is no reason why he should not have kept abreast of the latest developments in Italian architecture and planning, but his intention was to fulfil the conqueror’s desire for a mosque complex which would vie with St Sophia. Its purpose was to celebrate his conquest of Constantinople. The foundation inscription over the main entrance into the mosque reads: ‘He conquered with his sword this city whose like has not been created, whose match has not been built by the hands of the slaves [of God], and which had not been conquered by caliphs and sultans and emirs . . .’ Mehmed II had succeeded where so many others had failed. He pointed up the significance of this by including above the first panel of the foundation inscription the hadith: ‘They shall conquer Qostantiniya. Glory be to the prince and to

the army that shall achieve it.' This may be the first occasion on which it was openly used as official Ottoman propaganda.

Reflecting a continuing unease about the conquest and appropriation of Constantinople, the building of the Fatih Camii became a contentious issue. It was popularly supposed that it had been funded by the imposition of ground rents on properties in Constantinople, acquired at the time of the conquest. This was the cause of discontent and taken as evidence that Mehmed II's rule was becoming increasingly oppressive. Since the property had been his as conqueror to dispose of as he saw fit, Mehmed was within his rights to impose rent, but it offended against custom, which should have protected Muslims against the payment of rent. It looked very much as though within Constantinople Mehmed II was making little or no distinction between Christian and Muslim. In the past, relations between ruler and people depended very largely on custom, which provided a very flexible legal instrument and was well suited to the conditions of the early Ottoman state. It did not suit Mehmed II's concept of authority. He brought customary law under his control through a process of codification. The construction of the Fatih Camii therefore came to symbolise the changes in government which distanced Mehmed II from the practices of his forebears. In contrast to his father Murad II, who made himself accessible to his people, he preferred seclusion, which he ensured by a much elaborated court ceremonial.

Another proof of Mehmed II's increasingly autocratic behaviour came when he had the architect of the Fatih Camii, Atik Sinan, thrown into prison, where he died on 13 September 1471, just as the mosque was being completed. It was always said that the sultan had expected a building with proportions surpassing those of St Sophia and that the architect paid the price for failing to deliver on his remit.⁵⁷ Be that as it may, circles opposed to Mehmed II seized upon this act as evidence of the injustice and oppression of his rule. It is included in a version of the *Building of St Sophia*, which has been preserved in an anonymous Turkish chronicle of 1491 but must date from rather earlier. This work owes next to nothing to the original Greek text. It instead reflected a process of appropriation, which locked Constantinople into a Muslim past by drawing on an alternative set of traditions.⁵⁸ It supposes, for example, that the famous collapse of the dome of St Sophia in 558 occurred at the very hour of Muhammad's birth and that it remained unrepaired until the Emperor Herakleios sought the prophet's permission, which was duly given. The reconstruction of the dome could now go ahead and was completed, as luck would have it, to coincide with the *Hegira*. The emperor then secretly converted to Islam, thus anticipating the ultimate destiny of Constantinople.⁵⁹ Having evaded the Umayyad caliphs, its conquest would fall to an Ottoman sultan.

The criticism of Mehmed II had nothing to do with the conquest, but with his rebuilding of the city, which reflected his tyrannical rule. There were a series of specific charges: to pay for his projects the conqueror levied unjust taxes on other Ottoman cities and provinces. He used deportation as a means of obtaining a workforce. Masons and other workers were paid for three months and expected to work for double the length of time. Government inspectors made sure that any surplus money was returned to the treasury or accused the architects of embezzlement (which may be a better explanation of the treatment meted out to Atik Sinan). It was, in any case, a way of ensuring that the state paid nothing. How could such an undertaking be pleasing to God? But what could you expect, 'when it is merchants and businessmen, who make the law at the court of the rulers'? This contrasted with how things were in the time of Murad II, when slaves were kept in their place. 'Today the posts reserved for slaves multiply at court and you stand a better chance of preferment, if you are of foreign extraction.'⁶⁰ This was clearly aimed at the high proportion of Mehmed II's ministers who came from a Christian background. In the eyes of many the conquest of Constantinople had led to the corruption of Ottoman government. It was as though Constantinople had not been properly cleansed of its pernicious influences, which had then infected the Conqueror.

Even at the end of the Conqueror's reign Constantinople was still in the process of transformation into a Muslim city. Apart from the prestige projects of the sultan and his ministers the fabric of the city remained Byzantine. To Muslim settlers it must have seemed an alien place. It would have been in stark contrast to the old Ottoman capitals of Edirne and Bursa. By deliberately making himself a remote and mysterious presence Mehmed II only added to the sense of alienation felt by many Muslims. If his style of government owed nothing to Byzantium, Mehmed II was nevertheless fascinated by its history and traditions. He had a copy transcribed of the Greek text of the *Building of St Sophia* for his palace library. On the basis of this he commissioned at the end of his reign first a Turkish version and then a longer version in Persian. These had nothing in common with the popular Turkish adaptation, which is so critical of Mehmed II, but are true to the original Greek text. Since much of the material included in the popular version antedates the conquest of Constantinople, it is likely that Mehmed II deliberately chose to privilege the Greek text, as a way of emphasising that he had inherited responsibility for St Sophia and for Constantinople from the emperors of Byzantium. He used the rebuilding of Constantinople to emphasise the transformation not only of the power he wielded, but also of the whole character of the Ottoman enterprise.⁶¹

VIII

The Ottoman reaction to the conquest of Constantinople was muted. There are few, if any, signs of enthusiasm for a great victory, except in the letters purportedly sent by Mehmed II to other Muslim rulers to announce the news of the fall of Constantinople.⁶² It was the conqueror's decision to make Constantinople his new capital which made the event so problematical for Ottoman opinion. Constantinople's imperial associations hardly tallied with the ghazi traditions, which had hitherto been the main justification of Ottoman expansion. The transfer of the capital to Constantinople was a threat to both the ghazi warlords and to the *'ulema* – the establishment of Muslim lawyers and scholars. They understood that the conquest of Constantinople enhanced the sultan's authority, even if Mehmed II continued to maintain that he was still a ghazi king, in the mould of his father. In his letter to the Mamluk sultan announcing the news of the conquest of Constantinople he contrasted his responsibilities for the holy war against the infidel with the sultan's duty to oversee the pilgrimage to Mecca.⁶³ Faced with discontent among his troops, the Grand Vezir Mahmud Pasha insisted that Mehmed II was a ruler chosen by God to carry out holy war, but he then associated this with world conquest and the suppression of enemies of the state.⁶⁴ In other words, holy war had ceased to be an end in itself and was becoming an instrument of the autocratic power of the sultan. This was symbolised by and rooted in the city of Constantinople, which by virtue of conquest became the sultan's exclusive property.

In its way, the conquest of Constantinople was almost as traumatic for the Ottomans as the defeat at Ankara some fifty years before. Both called in question the purpose and identity of the Ottoman enterprise. After the humiliation of the defeat at Ankara the Ottomans clung to the notion of a dynasty of ghazi kings, which seemed to explain their purpose and achievements rather well. The conquest of Constantinople was in a sense the culmination of the Ottoman mission. That was the problem. It marked a new phase in Ottoman history, where the past no longer served as a guide. It allowed Mehmed II to institute an autocracy, which seemed to emancipate him from Ottoman customs and tradition and from the obligations of his forebears. A large part of the problem was Constantinople itself. Mehmed II had the greatest difficulty in persuading Turks to take up residence in his new capital. Drafting in large numbers of Greeks only underlined its alien character. But the transformation of Constantinople into Istanbul gathered pace from the end of Mehmed II's reign. It became a Muslim city which increasingly effaced traces of its Byzantine past, as new mosques began to

dominate the skyline. Ottoman opinion began to accept that the conquest of Constantinople was its destiny. In the end, it united around the hadith 'They shall conquer Qostantiniya. Glory be to the prince and to the army that shall achieve it', and accepted that it provided a justification for Mehmed II's conquest and transformation of Constantinople. By the sixteenth century Ottoman autocracy was no longer an unwarranted innovation, but had taken root, while Istanbul had developed traditions of its own, which owed nothing to Byzantium.

Evliya Çelebi – the renowned seventeenth-century Ottoman traveller – started his travels by providing a description of Istanbul, his native city, and collecting some of its traditions. For him the conquest of Constantinople was the beginning of a new era, which had been foretold in the hadith of the prophet. But, in order to connect it with its past, he rehearses the traditions of the original foundation of the city and outlines its refoundation by Constantine. In the same vein he details the monuments surviving from this era, which had by now assumed a talismanic quality for the Ottomans. He singles out the columns of Arcadius, Theodosius and Marcian, as well as the Alti Mermer, the six columns which were the most conspicuous remains of the hippodrome. They were connected in the popular mind with six sages of antiquity: Philip, Hippokrates, Sokrates, Pythagoras, Aristotle and Galen. Evliya then prefaces an account of the conquest of Constantinople by introducing a family connection. He believed that his great-grandfather had been the Conqueror's standard-bearer, who had used his share of the booty obtained from the sack of Constantinople to buy up land in the city and build new houses. It was in one of these, Evliya tells us, that he had been born a century and a half later. The city in which he grew up was now a network of neighbourhoods (*mahalle*). Evliya made it his business to obtain details of their settlement in the aftermath of the conquest. He collects together all kinds of traditions about the conquest of Constantinople, many of them featuring Akshemseddin, who now appears as the Conqueror's chief spiritual adviser. It was Akshemseddin who validated the conquest by fastening an egret's plume to Mehmed II's turban with the words, 'You have become the chosen prince of the House of Osman, continue to fight valiantly in the path of God.' The bitter criticism there had been of the sultan in the past has disappeared without trace. Evliya has the story of the architect of the Fatih Camii, but in a quite unexpected form. Upset by his constructive dismissal by the sultan, who was displeased by his failure to surpass the proportions of St Sophia, the architect took his case to the kadi of Istanbul. The sultan was duly cited to appear before the kadi, who decided that he must pay the architect a pension as a recompense for his ill treatment. This is a story that

not only places the Conqueror in a happier light, but also underlines that the sultan is not above the law.⁶⁵

IX

Though critical of many aspects of Ottoman government in his own day, Evliya Çelebi idealised the Ottoman past. This included presenting the conquest of Constantinople as a triumph for Mehmed II. He is oblivious of the tensions produced in the heart of the Ottoman establishment by the conquest and appropriation of Constantinople. These were inseparable from the transformation carried out under the auspices of the Conqueror, which turned the Ottoman Empire into a world power. The conquest of Constantinople forced the Ottoman leadership to confront a dilemma which had already been the cause of bitter divisions. Was it possible to maintain the integrity of their ghazi mission, while at the same time laying the institutional foundations of an Empire? It was a predicament which in one form or another went to the heart of the political life of Muslim states.⁶⁶ It was carefully analysed at the end of the fourteenth century by Ibn Khaldun in the *Muqaddima*, using his experience of the ephemeral nomadic 'Empires' of North Africa, which provided the context and much of the material for this work.⁶⁷ The martial qualities instilled into the Bedouin and Berber tribes by their way of life allowed them to conquer settled societies, but not to dominate them, with the result that they soon found themselves absorbed into the age-old patterns of settled society and thus unable to maintain that sense of group solidarity on which their power depended. There were similarities to the Ottoman experience, making due allowance for the fact that the Ottomans had been a ghazi power expanding into *Dar al-Harb* – into infidel territory – whereas the Bedouin and Berbers were making inroads into territories that were already part of *Dar al-Islam*. If it was only at the turn of the sixteenth century that Ottoman scholars turned directly to Ibn Khaldun for guidance, they had long been working within a similar framework of ideas.⁶⁸ They recognised the importance of the slave institution as a means of preserving solidarity around the Ottoman sultan. It was part of the debate initiated by the fall of Constantinople over the changing character of the Ottoman enterprise. It reflected the growing endorsement of the autocratic authority of the sultan.

The divisions at the heart of the Ottoman establishment pre-dated the fall of Constantinople, which only set them in higher relief. They might with time have faded, if Constantinople had not fallen. But an Ottoman Empire with Edirne as its capital would have been a very different proposition from the one which took shape after 1453. Edirne was perfectly situated for the

conquest of the Balkans, but not for expansion into the Mediterranean and Black Sea. Without sea power the Ottomans were condemned to being no more than a regional power. If we are to believe Kritoboulos, it was exactly this prospect which was one of the motivating forces behind Mehmed II's desire to take Constantinople.⁶⁹ What is indisputable is that he quickly grasped the nature of the opportunities which Constantinople afforded. These emerge from Tursun Beg's description of the site chosen by Mehmed II for his New Palace on the Akropolis of Constantinople. He singled out the way it overlooked the arsenal and the port installations and stood at the meeting point of two continents and two seas. It was, in other words, at the crossroads of the world. Only through Constantinople was the Ottoman Empire able to fulfil its great potential. Therein lies the real historical importance of the fall of Constantinople: in the creation of a new world power which sought to surpass the Empire of Constantine, Theodosius and Justinian; not only as a political power, but also as a civilisation manifested in its architecture and court life. It was a civilisation which owed almost nothing to Byzantium. But making due allowance for differences of religion it had much in common with its Byzantine counterpart. Both were court orientated and took great pride in court ceremonial. Both were hierarchical and highly elitist. Both evolved literary languages that were thoroughly artificial. Both could boast spectacular architecture and art. If the emergence of Ottoman civilisation was a positive consequence of the fall of Constantinople, the destruction of Byzantine civilisation was its negative counterpart.

Notes

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- 3 See now D.J. Kastritsis, *The Sons of Bayezid: Empire Building and Representation in the Ottoman Civil War of 1402–1413* [Ottoman Empire and its Heritage, 38] (Leiden: Brill, 2007).
- 4 V.D. Papoulia, *Ursprung und Wesen der 'Knabenlese' im Osmanischen Reich* [Südosteuropäische Arbeiten, 59] (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1963); J.A.B. Palmer, 'The origin of the Janissaries', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 35 (1953), 448–81; P. Wittek, 'Devshirme and Shari'a', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 17 (1955), 271–8; Sp. Vryonis Jr., 'Isidore Glabas and the Turkish

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- 5 Babinger, 'Von Amurath zu Amurath', 229–65.
 - 6 See Th. Stavrides, *The Sultan of Vezirs: The Life and Times of the Ottoman Grand Vezir Mahmud Pasha Angelović (1453–1474)* [The Ottoman Empire and its Heritage, 24] (Leiden: Brill, 2001).
 - 7 Babinger, *Mehmed the Conqueror and his Time*, 499–500. See C. Heywood, 'Mehmed II and the historians: the reception of Babinger's *Mehmed der Eroberer* during half a century', *Turcica*, 40 (2008), 295–344.
 - 8 Pertusi, *La caduta di Costantinopoli*, I, 301–3; Kissling, 'Aq Šems ed-Din', 323–33.
 - 9 P. Wittek, 'Ayvansaray. Un sanctuaire privé de son héros', *Mélanges Henri Grégoire*, III [Annuaire de l'Institut de Philologie et d'Histoire orientales et slaves, 11] (Brussels: Université libre de Bruxelles, 1951), 505–26.
 - 10 Kritoboulos, ed. Reinsch, I, 26, 1–2: 41.29–37; transl. Riggs, 41; Tursun Beg, *The History of Mehmed the Conqueror*, ed. H. Inalcik and R. Murphey (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1978), 34, 36a; Tursun Bey, *La conquista di Costantinopoli*, transl. L. Berardi [Islamica, 2] (Milan: Mondadori, 2007), 62.
 - 11 Ç. Kafescioğlu, *Constantinopolis/Istanbul: Cultural Encounter, Imperial Vision, and the Construction of the Ottoman Capital* [Buildings, Landscapes, and Societies, 5] (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009), 45–51.
 - 12 Tursun Beg, ed. Inalcik and Murphey; reviewed by V.L. Ménage in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 43 (1980), 144–5; transl. L. Berardi.
 - 13 Inalcik, 'Tursun Beg, historian of Mehmed the Conqueror's time', 57–71; N. Vatin, 'Tursun Beg assista-t-il au siege de Constantinople en 1453?', *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*, 91 (2001), 317–29.
 - 14 H. Inalcik, 'How to read 'Ashik Pasha-zade's History'', in C. Heywood and C. Imber (eds), *Studies in Honour of Professor V.L. Ménage* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 1994), 143–7; Kafescioğlu, *Constantinopolis/Istanbul*, 119–20.
 - 15 V.L. Ménage, *Neshri's History of the Ottomans: The Sources and the Development of the Text* [London Oriental Series, 16] (London: Oxford University Press, 1964).
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 - 17 *Kitâb-ı Cihan-Nümâ Neşri Tarihi*, ed. F.R. Unat and M.A. Köymen (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Başimeri, 1957), II, 706.8–9; Pertusi, *La caduta di Costantinopoli*, II, 265.143–5.
 - 18 *Tevarih-i Al-i Osman'dan Aşıkpaşazade tarihi*, ed. Ali Beğ (Istanbul: Matbaa-yi Amire, 1914), 132; R.F. Kreutel, *Von Hirtenzelt zur hohen Pforte. Frühzeit und Aufstieg des Osmanreiches nach der Chronik "Denkwürdigkeiten und Zeitläufe des Hauses 'Osman' vom Derwisch Ahmet, gennant 'Aşık-Paşa-Sohn"* [Osmanische Geschichtsschreiber, 3] (Graz, Vienna and Cologne: Verlag Styria, 1959), 199.

- 19 Kritoboulos, ed. Reinsch, I, 73, 8: 83.21–4; transl. Riggs, 83.
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- 21 Kafescioğlu, *Constantinopolis/Istanbul*, 24–8.
- 22 Kritoboulos, ed. Reinsch, I, 1, 1: 90.1–6; transl. Riggs, 93; Doukas, ed. Becker, XLII: 313.6–17; transl. Magoulas, 241.
- 23 Kafescioğlu, *Constantinopolis/Istanbul*, 22–4.
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- 26 Kafescioğlu, *Constantinopolis/Istanbul*, 66–96.
- 27 Ibid. 56–66; G. Necipoğlu, *Architecture, Ceremonial, and Power: the Top Kapi Palace in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 1991), 3–13.
- 28 Tursun Beg, ed. Inalcik and Murphey, 58a; transl. Berardi, 93.
- 29 Necipoğlu, *Architecture, Ceremonial, and Power*, 34–6.
- 30 Pierre Gilles, *The Antiquities of Constantinople*, 2nd edn (New York: Ithaca Press, 1988), 97–8; Kafescioğlu, *Constantinopolis/Istanbul*, 59–60; C. Mango, 'Three Imperial Byzantine sarcophagi discovered in 1750', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 16 (1962), 397–402; J. Raby, 'A Sultan of paradox: Mehmed the Conqueror as a patron of the arts', *Oxford Art Journal*, 5 (1982), 3–8.
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- 43 Kafescioğlu, *Constantinopolis/Istanbul*, 109–19; Stavrides, *Sultan of Vezirs*, 258–93.
- 44 Raby, 'Sultan of paradox', 3; Stavrides, *Sultan of Vezirs*, 92–3.
- 45 Doukas, ed. Becker, XXXIX, 288.3–4; transl. Magoulias, 225.
- 46 F. Babinger, *Die Geschichtsschreiber der Osmanen und ihre Werke* (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1927), 19–20; Stavrides, *Sultan of Vezirs*, 296–7.
- 47 Stavrides, *Sultan of Vezirs*, 294–6.
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- 63 Ahmed Ateş, 'İstanbul'un fethine dair Fatih Sultan Mehmed tarafından gönderilen mektublar ve bunlara gelen cevaplar', *Tarih Dergisi*, 4 (1952), 16.18–23.
- 64 Tursun Beg, ed. Inalcik and Murphey, 43, 84b; transl. Berardi, 134–5.
- 65 Evliyâ Efendî, *Narrative of Travels in Europe, Asia and Africa in the Seventeenth Century*, transl. J. von Hammer (London: Oriental Translation Fund, 1834), 1–48.
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- 67 E.I.J. Rosenthal, *Political Thought in Medieval Islam: An Introductory Outline* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 84–109; Aziz al-Azmeh, *Ibn Khaldûn: An Essay in Reinterpretation* (London: Frank Cass, 1982); Y. Lacoste, *Ibn Khaldun: The Birth of History and the Past of the Third World* (London: Verso, 1984); S.F. Dale, 'Ibn Khaldun, the last Greek and the first Annaliste historian', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 38 (2006), 431–51.
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CHAPTER 7

What was lost?

I

It was recognised after the event that the disparity of forces made the fall of Constantinople well nigh inevitable. At the time, nobody could be so sure.¹ Among the Ottoman leadership there were many who thought that the siege would be a perilous undertaking and believed that conquest would work against their best interests. The West was more complacent and showed very little sense of urgency about the fate of the city. The Byzantines believed that the defences of the city would hold. It was a confidence based not only on past experience but also on extensive repairs to the city's walls undertaken by John VIII Palaiologos.² That Constantinople did fall, contrary to general expectation, can be blamed on various combinations of circumstances, but finally it was the determination of Mehmed II and of those around him to see the siege through to the bitter end which was the decisive factor. The conquest of Constantinople allowed the Ottoman Empire, which already existed in embryo, to develop its full potential as a Mediterranean and then as a world power. This was the most important consequence of the fall of Constantinople. It forced the Ottomans to confront their destiny. Less obviously, this was also true of the Russians, who found themselves the only major Orthodox power left in existence. For the West it was less dramatic. The fall of Constantinople only affected the Venetians and the Genoese directly. It meant that they now had to trade on rather less favourable terms than had been the case under the Byzantine Empire, but more serious than this was the Ottoman determination to use the conquest of Constantinople to establish control over the Black Sea and the Aegean; in other words, to end the Italian Republics' domination of these seas. The Venetians and the Genoese reacted in very different ways to the ensuing challenge. The Genoese gave up without a fight.³ When in 1479 the Ottomans captured Caffa, the main Genoese entrepôt in the Crimea, and transferred its

inhabitants to Constantinople, it hardly mattered, for by then the centre of gravity of Genoese activities had shifted to the western Mediterranean and the Atlantic. To their cost the Venetians decided that there was more to be gained from resisting the Ottomans. As a result they suffered the indignities of defeat in a long war, which ended in 1479. They lost their main base at Negroponte and were eased out of the Aegean. This left their remaining territories in Crete and the Peloponnese vulnerable to Ottoman attack. The Venetians were increasingly forced back to their territories on the Italian mainland. The Ottoman conquest did not mean that the Venetians and Genoese ceased trading at Constantinople and in the Aegean, but it did mean that they no longer dominated the markets, as they had done before 1453. The Genoese accepted this with greater realism than the Venetians, who were even prepared to participate in unsuccessful papal schemes for a crusade to rescue Constantinople.

However, there was another Western power, which had more to lose, if less directly, from the fall of Constantinople than either the Venetians or the Genoese. This was the papacy. Its failure either to defend Constantinople or to recover it was a serious blow to its prestige and moral authority. In the first place, it shattered the Union of Churches, which to all appearances was the most significant of its recent achievements. The Union appeared to be an important step towards the recovery of the prestige and authority enjoyed by the papacy at its medieval height, but it needed a successful crusade to complement it, if only to demonstrate control over what in the past had been one of its main instruments of power. The defeat of the Varna crusade in 1444 was a setback, but Pius II's failed attempt to launch a crusade for the recovery of Constantinople was worse, because it exposed the futility of the attempts being made by the papacy to restore its authority on its medieval foundations. It revealed that its effective authority was more or less limited to Italy. There was – with the exception of Burgundy – no response from Northern Europe to Pius II's call for a crusade, which underlined the extent to which it belonged to the past. It had become little more than rhetoric, which it would remain for some time to come.

If the crusade proved an anachronistic response to the fall of Constantinople, concern over the heritage of ancient Greece pointed to the future. There were fears that with the fall of Constantinople its treasures would be lost. Italian humanists were convinced that they had a responsibility to rescue them. This transformed their relationship to the Hellenic past. Before 1453 they had welcomed Greek scholars, but were the more or less passive recipients of their expertise. But after 1453 it was a different matter. Greek scholars still sought refuge in Italy, but they rarely enjoyed the success of the

previous generation. It was not so much that there was no longer a demand for teachers of Greek. It was far more that Italian humanists now saw themselves as the guardians of ancient Greece, which allowed them to cultivate its heritage in their own way without deference to Byzantine tradition. It not only opened up a new and fruitful chapter in the history of classical studies, but also added a stronger cultural element to the identity of the Latin West, which was becoming as much European as it was Christian, bearing in mind that underpinning the increasingly pervasive notion of Europe was a sense of being heirs to the classical tradition. Materially, the fall of Constantinople made very little difference to the West. But it provided a new perspective on the past, which helped to clarify and on occasion to intensify and even to accelerate changes that were already happening.

In their different ways, Ottomans, Europeans and Russians all had much to gain from the fall of Constantinople, but what of those Greeks, who would seem, as Sir Steven Runciman has suggested, to have been its principal victims? For the 50,000 or so inhabitants of Constantinople it was traumatic. The majority were led away into captivity. Very many of them eventually made their way back to Constantinople, where they attempted to pick up the threads of their lives, but others converted to Islam or were condemned to a life of slavery. It was mainly members of the Byzantine aristocracy who managed to escape from the conquered city to Chios, Crete, Dalmatia, and eventually Italy or even Moscow, where other members of their families might join them. They formed communities in exile, which were sooner or later absorbed into local society.⁴ A different fate awaited other prominent Byzantine aristocrats: they were executed on the orders of the sultan, while their children were taken into Ottoman service, where they often distinguished themselves. Their counterparts in the Byzantine Church fared better. They may have been taken into captivity, but they were quickly released. With the restoration of the patriarchate they soon became part of the Ottoman establishment.

The Orthodox Church survived the fall of Constantinople, if not unscathed, then more or less intact. Thanks to Mount Athos, monastic life continued untouched and even prospered under Ottoman auspices for a century or more. From the end of the fourteenth century, if not earlier, the Athonite monasteries had come under Ottoman protection. This was only the most striking example of the interaction of Christians and Ottomans: a phenomenon not unlike the Spanish *convivencia*, but with the difference that in the Iberian peninsula it was largely driven by Christians, whereas in the Balkans it was dominated by the Ottomans. Consequently, it worked very largely to undermine Christian society, for all too often it meant conversion

to Islam, although in the process, as F.W. Hasluck showed long ago, much of Byzantine popular culture survived.⁵ It was a phenomenon that antedated the fall of Constantinople by at least a century.

When assessing the impact of the fall of Constantinople on Greek society it is therefore important to remember two things. The first is that outside Constantinople there was a surprising degree of continuity. The second, which helps to explain this, is that by 1453 perhaps a majority of Greeks had already been assimilated into an Ottoman order. Often this meant conversion, but many Greeks retained their faith and formed distinct communities with an officer, usually called a *krites* (or judge), at their head. They played a significant role in the early development of the Ottoman administration by providing fiscal and financial expertise. In the years before 1453 an alternative Greek society was coming into being, but only with the conquest of Constantinople did it take on its definitive form. The decisive step was the restoration of the Orthodox Patriarchate under Ottoman auspices, the initiative for which came from Greek *archontes* in Ottoman service. Henceforth the institutional Church provided a framework for Greek communities under Ottoman rule.⁶ It forced a resolution of the uncertainties there were before 1453 over Byzantine identity. These revolved around a question originally posed in a different context: Was it possible for there to be a Church but no Christian emperor?⁷ The fall of Constantinople provided the answer that it was. Even if it meant subjugation to infidel rule, very many Greeks believed that this was a price worth paying for preserving the integrity of Orthodoxy. There was to be no serious attempt, as there had been after 1204, to reconstitute the Empire in exile. Instead, what was left of the Byzantine world in the Peloponnese and the islands and in Trebizond hastened to submit to the sultan. Thus began a new phase in the long history of Hellenism.

II

At first sight, much of what was essential to Byzantium survived 1453. It preserved its monastic culture and its popular customs and beliefs. The Orthodox Church continued more or less unchanged in institutional terms. Bishops and the patriarch now received their commission or *berat* from the sultan, but there was relatively little Ottoman interference in the day-to-day working of ecclesiastical life. Yet Byzantium as a civilisation ceased to exist. The Orthodox Patriarchate proved incapable of sustaining it. This was largely because it jettisoned its classical component, as of little relevance to the Church's immediate needs. The key was education. It is most unlikely that the Patriarch Gennadios established a patriarchal school, as some later writers

believed.⁸ There were, however, competent scholars who preferred to stay on in patriarchal service rather than to try their luck in Italy. Matthew Kamariotes, a pupil of the patriarch himself, is the best example.⁹ He became Grand Rhetor of the Great Church and produced some textbooks of grammar and rhetoric, but otherwise there are few signs of intellectual activity, which suggests the thread of learning passed down through the generations was wearing very thin. It is worth considering why this should have been. It obviously had something to do with subordination to the Ottoman regime, which became increasingly oppressive. These were conditions where survival came to be seen as requiring adherence to an increasingly rigid traditionalism made up of the mystical theology of Gregory Palamas and the Aristotelianism of Patriarch Gennadios himself. It was a recipe for intellectual stagnation, which was a denial of an essential feature of civilisations. This is their ability to renew and even reinvent themselves, which was true of Byzantine civilisation almost to the bitter end, admittedly within the parameters of a fairly strict tradition.

The fall of Constantinople dealt a deathblow to Byzantine civilisation, which to the end remained surprisingly vibrant. It has many achievements to its credit, some of which appeal to modern taste and some of which do not. There has always been an appreciation of Byzantine *objets de luxe*, as W.B. Yeats intuitively understood in his poem 'Sailing to Byzantium', where he celebrates the artistry of the Byzantine goldsmith, who knew how to make precious items out 'of hammered gold and gold enamelling to keep a drowsy emperor awake'. But it is Byzantium's religious art and architecture which continue to astonish. The modern onlooker can still catch a glimmer in a Byzantine church of that sense of heaven come down to earth. Equally, the art of the icon has countless modern admirers. If the icon provided the medieval devotee with a channel of communication to the heavenly world, it supplies today's counterpart with the faintest reflection of the Byzantine vision of the world, which is apparently acceptable to modern taste in visual terms, but for some reason not in literary form. Byzantine literature has not enjoyed the appreciation afforded in the modern – or even post-modern – world to Byzantine art, even though both were governed by strict convention and are by contemporary standards artificial and contrived. An adherence to a rigid set of rules was only a reflection of a society which placed a premium on order, but this was no ordinary order. It was an order which reflected the divine with its carefully arranged hierarchies and elaborate ceremonial. Byzantine literature helped to explain the meaning of this vision, but in a way that is out of kilter with modern sensibilities. This does not mean that Byzantine achievements in literature were negligible; they may even be on a par with those in art and architecture. This is most obviously the case for

the writing of history. The succession of medieval Byzantine historians provides a compelling and comprehensive record of how an idealised society fared in reality. Modern criticism concentrates on the overemphasis in much Byzantine history on the deeds of emperors, but given an emperor-centred view of society it is difficult to see what else Byzantine historians could have done. By way of compensation they were alert to the contrast of ideal and reality; they were often intensely critical of those emperors who in their opinion failed to live up to the stern responsibilities imposed upon them by their office. It is much harder to make out a case for the literary value of court rhetoric, which was designed to extol imperial authority, until we remember that its audience treated it as a form of theatre and took great pleasure in what we might now condemn as the artificial use of language. In the same way as ceremonial, it was designed to celebrate the vision of a harmonious society revolving around the emperor. It was only within the framework of such a society that it was thought possible to establish the nature of truth and of correct belief or Orthodoxy. However contested these may have been, they lay at the heart of Byzantine civilisation.¹⁰ They gave it serious purpose conveyed not only through worship and devotions, but also through a rich literature, which came in the form of sermons, hymnography, theological treatises, devotional works and saints' lives. It was not, however, self-sustaining, as becomes all too clear after the fall of Constantinople. It required not only the level of education and intellectual debate which had existed before 1453, but also the framework of ideas and institutions surrounding the imperial ideal.

Reflecting its seriousness of purpose are the rigidity and sense of objectification of much Byzantine literature, which has led to the general criticism that it lacks a personal element and an engagement with everyday life. But this is to make a judgement based on modern expectations. If Byzantine literature preferred the suppression of the self to its exploration, this does not mean that it failed to develop an autobiographical tradition; far from it, but Byzantine autobiographies almost always assume some form of disguise.¹¹ The main purpose of Byzantine literature was to celebrate, while subjecting to critical examination, an ideal which combined both religious belief and its institutional clothing. It was a task which placed a heavy responsibility on writers, while at the same time giving them great influence. The place of the writer in Byzantine society emerges most clearly from the many collections of letters surviving from Byzantium, which constitute a major literary legacy, even if they rarely fulfil the modern expectation that letters should convey personal information. That was not their intention. They were valued as examples of style, and that is the point, for the ability to appreciate literary

style was the hallmark of the educated elite at Byzantium. The exchange of letters proclaimed a 'commonwealth of letters'! In doing so, it emphasised that Byzantine literary culture was thoroughly elitist. In one way or another the exchange of letters formed part of a continuing conversation, which defined and united an educated elite and allowed its members to pose as the self-appointed purveyors and guardians of Byzantine civilisation.¹² It was a civilisation which had as its purpose the maintenance – through the exposition and justification of an ideology and a system of belief – of a regime which was both imperial and Orthodox. Its perpetuation was the work of an educated elite, which gravitated to the imperial court and to the Patriarchal Church, where they often obtained positions of authority. Education was their path to preferment. They received a classical education little changed since the days of the Emperor Hadrian and the Second Sophistic. Teaching was largely in the hands of private schoolmasters, some of whom were accomplished scholars in their own right. A few enjoyed imperial patronage, but a palace school was never a permanent feature of the educational system at Byzantium.¹³

Imperial interest in higher education was largely practical. It was a way of ensuring a pool of trained administrators, whom were also capable, when the need arose, of articulating a vision of an ideal order. This was of a hierarchical and harmonious society revolving around the emperor, who in collaboration with the patriarch guaranteed peace, justice and the integrity of the Orthodox faith. It was a vision that commanded general assent. A measure of the success of imperial propagandists is the hold this vision exercised over the popular imagination, which patterned its image of the kingdom of heaven on the imperial court.¹⁴ In practice, this vision served as part of the ideological justification for a political order. In this Byzantine civilisation scarcely differed from other civilisations, which were equally expressions of a vision transmuted into an ideology, but it may have experienced a more than usual degree of subordination to political and religious power. This was reflected in the way it found its major intellectual expression in theology, rhetoric, law and history and its primary artistic expression in the decoration of palaces and churches. These were all activities designed to reinforce a political regime. But too close an identification with a political order is usually a recipe for stagnation. Civilisations require a degree of autonomy if they are to reinvent themselves, for it is this ability which lies at the heart of their originality and creativity.

This raises the question of whether Byzantine civilisation had an existence separate from the imperial regime, to which the answer is that it did and it did not: it *did not* to the extent that the imperial court remained a major

arena of cultural activity; it *did* in so far that, as the guardians and purveyors of Byzantine civilisation, the educated elite enjoyed considerable freedom of action. Their independence of imperial authority was reinforced by private study of the classics backed up in some cases by private devotions of a mystical nature. The attachment of the members of the elite to the classical tradition remains beyond doubt. Proof of this is their contribution to the survival of so many classical texts. They not only promoted the work of Byzantine copyists – or indeed were copyists themselves – but the most gifted, as scholars in their own right, provided commentaries on classical texts, which are still esteemed by modern scholarship. The classics provided reading for pleasure. That they continued to be appreciated for their own sake is evident from the way Byzantine *literati* revived classical literary genres, such as the novel and the satire, which vie in quality with their models.¹⁵ Byzantine authors were surprisingly successful at recreating the atmosphere and scenery of a classical past. They kept alive the memory of a society with a very different outlook, beliefs and moral values from those entertained at Byzantium. There is something schizophrenic about any elite which juggles two such disparate ideals as classical antiquity and Christian Orthodoxy. But it was exactly their juxtaposition which provided Byzantium with its intellectual vitality. It allowed a constant reworking of the classical tradition through the agency of Christianity and vice versa, but always very much within an imperial framework. At the time this was a heady mixture. At its core was the encounter of reason and revelation, which has energised many civilisations, not all of them Christian. But at Byzantium it was given a sharper edge, because of the emphasis there was on mysticism, which acted as a counterpoint to a devotion to classical studies; always remembering that the most prominent exponents of both mysticism and classical scholarship came necessarily from Byzantium's educated elite.

More than other medieval civilisations Byzantium exaggerated those elements of elitism and artificiality which even if understood in their best sense, have given it a bad name. Byzantium was atypical too in that the element of continuity with the classical past was that much greater. This was embodied by Constantinople, which preserved a great deal of its late antique past. It fostered a sense of timelessness, of immutability, which was intrinsic to Byzantine civilisation, even if outside its walls so much had changed. It showed itself in an avowed aversion to innovation. But this narrowness and apparent immobility not only masked its ability to adapt – in other words, to reinvent itself – but also gave it undoubted strengths. It displayed, more than other medieval civilisations, an intensity of focus and a concentration on essentials.

III

When considering what was lost in 1453, we should not be dazzled by Byzantine civilisation in its prime, but assess its condition after the catastrophe of 1204, when the crusaders conquered Constantinople. The structure of the Byzantine Empire in its last phase was very different from what it had been before 1204. Michael VIII Palaiologos might have recovered Constantinople from the Latins in 1261, but he was never fully able to make good the damage done during the period of the Latin Empire, when Constantinople lost control over its provinces. It soon became clear that the price of restoration was the toleration of a large measure of local autonomy, which rendered the Byzantine Empire in its last centuries politically weak and fragmented – although intellectually and artistically it was another matter. The restored Empire saw an impressive revival of the arts and scholarship, which is usually dubbed the Palaiologan Renaissance.¹⁶ It was a reaction to the spectre of the destruction of Byzantine civilisation ushered in by the Latin conquest of Constantinople. It bequeathed a rich legacy to the Byzantine scholars of the fifteenth century, and an attitude of mind which valued intellectual activity as a compensation for political decline, but by the mid-fourteenth century it was beginning to falter. Its last great figure was Theodore Metochites, who died in 1332. A statesman and a polymath, he is best remembered as the patron of the monastery of St Saviour in Chora at Constantinople.¹⁷ He supervised the decoration of its church and funerary chapel, which was completed in 1321. Nothing else epitomises quite so well the achievements of the Palaiologan Renaissance. The great art historian Otto Demus detected in its mosaics and frescoes ‘something new, the products of a deep crisis, of a revolution greater than that of the iconoclastic controversy’.¹⁸ It would be more correct to say ‘portents’ rather than ‘products’, for the crisis did not materialise until after Metochites’s death. It came in the form of a reaction against the humanism which had inspired the latter’s approach to scholarship, life and art. More positively it took the shape of a mystical movement conventionally labelled hesychasm, which centred on Mount Athos.¹⁹ Its luminary was Gregory Palamas (c.1296–1359), who as a young man abandoned a promising career at the imperial court for the life of a mystic on Mount Athos. Called upon to defend his new way of life, he converted the rather simple-minded mysticism he had embraced into an impressive system of thought, which was to dominate and distort Byzantine intellectual life.²⁰

Its ascendancy coincided with the collapse of Byzantium into a welter of civil war, loss of territory and social unrest. It provided solace at a time of deep crisis by minimising the importance of this world. It undermined the

Byzantine vision of a harmonious society around the emperor by glorifying the mystic and by celebrating mysticism, as the true focus of human activity. It represented the rejection of the old order, but the alternative vision it provided was not capable of revitalising Byzantine society. As a result, Byzantium lost any clear direction. That guiding sense of continuity going back to a Roman past was wearing thin, as the unbroken series of Byzantine histories came to an end with the completion in 1369 of the self-serving memoirs of the ex-Emperor John VI Kantakouzenos (1347–54).²¹ It was almost an admission that Byzantium too had run its course. One major figure refused to accept that this could be so. This was Demetrios Kydones, who had been Kantakouzenos's chief minister. However, by insisting that Byzantium's survival was only possible with Latin help and by advocating the Union of Churches he was admitting that Byzantium had lost control of its destiny.²² Demetrios Kydones exerted a profound influence upon Manuel II Palaiologos (1391–1425), who was vouchsafed the chance to rebuild Byzantium and to restore the vision which had sustained Byzantine civilisation over the centuries. We have already seen the steps he took in the aftermath of the Ottoman defeat at the battle of Ankara in 1402 to revive intellectual life. His great achievement was to restore the balance between Orthodoxy and the classical tradition, which had been impaired by the hesychast domination of the patriarchate. He sought the path of reconciliation by encouraging the return of humanist scholars, such as Manuel Chrysoloras, who had been forced into exile at the end of the fourteenth century; by supporting the educational work of John Chortasmenos, whose Orthodox credentials were never in doubt; by protecting George Gemistos Plethon, whose Orthodoxy was suspect; and by the respect he showed for hesychasts, such as Joseph Bryennios, Makarios Makres, and Symeon, archbishop of Thessaloniki. However precarious his success may have been, Manuel II Palaiologos was able to reunite the essentials of Byzantine civilisation around the imperial office and to revive the Byzantine vision. The reality, of course, was that it scarcely extended beyond the walls of Constantinople. Except in name there was no longer an empire. The progressive retreat to the core meant that Constantinople was more or less all that was left; at best Byzantium was becoming a city-state. It was, all the same, remarkable that it was still in existence.

Even more remarkable was the cultural vitality it displayed in its closing years. Its apparent confidence may have been a cover for a desperate attempt to preserve a vision which was on the point of dissolution. It was nevertheless a convincing enough act to win the grudging admiration of Western travellers to Constantinople,²³ even if there were those who suspected that it was more a matter of preserving an illusion than anything else. As the

Castilian traveller Pero Tafur noted during his stay in Constantinople in 1437, 'the emperor's state is as splendid as ever, for nothing is omitted from the ancient ceremonies, but, properly regarded, he is like a bishop without a see'.²⁴ We should not underestimate the importance to the Byzantine emperor of ceremonial display. It was a way of maintaining respect for the imperial office as much abroad as at home. It lay at the heart of Byzantine diplomacy, which became crucial for Byzantium's hopes of survival, for these depended on the manipulation of the interplay of power around Constantinople. Diplomacy had to do service for military might, since the last Byzantine emperors had no forces worthy of the name at their command.²⁵ Instead, they mounted wave upon wave of diplomatic offensives with the aim of securing military and naval help from the West and financial support from Russia. They distributed great quantities of relics as a way of impressing their moral standing on foreign rulers.²⁶ As a last resort, the emperors themselves travelled abroad in the hope of winning friends and obtaining foreign aid. If they came away more often than not empty-handed, their imperial bearing made a deep impression on their hosts.²⁷ This was some reward for the care they took to ensure that they cut the right figure abroad. Before setting out for Italy in 1437 to attend the Union Council, the Emperor John VIII Palaiologos appropriated alms donated to the monastery of the Pantokrator by the archbishop of Russia, so that he was accoutred in a way befitting an emperor.²⁸

In its banal way this story illustrates the material help that Byzantium received from the wider Orthodox world, which is often referred to as the Byzantine Commonwealth. Any Byzantine influence in these countries was entirely due to the outreach of the Orthodox Church, which meant that Constantinople remained the focal point for Orthodox Christians throughout the world. Such prestige as the Byzantine emperor enjoyed abroad depended to a very large extent on his role as the lay protector of the Orthodox Church. It provided an earnest that the Byzantine vision was still intact. It was this more than anything that recommended him to the papacy, which believed that the emperor could deliver the Union of the Churches. The Orthodox Church was consequently one of the emperor's few remaining political assets. It was therefore imperative for reasons of state that the emperors maintained control over the patriarchate, which at the turn of the fourteenth century they seemed to be losing. One of Manuel II's major successes after his return from exile was to exploit a precedent established under his father in order to reassert imperial ascendancy over the patriarchate.²⁹ This was the cause of growing disquiet among the officers of the Patriarchal Church, who resented the way the emperor had 'reduced the Church of Christ to a condition of servitude',³⁰ a state of affairs which paved the way for the dominant role

played by the Emperor John VIII Palaiologos at the council of Ferrara Florence in his effort to secure the reunion of the Churches.

This episode epitomised the dangers to the Orthodox Church which issued from its subservience to imperial authority, and left many leading ecclesiastics bitterly disillusioned. There was increasing agitation against imperial intervention in the affairs of the Church. John VIII's political skills allowed him to damp down the subsequent discontent, but in retrospect it becomes clear that the Byzantine vision and with it Byzantine civilisation was on the point of dissolution. It was most obvious in ecclesiastical impatience with imperial authority, which culminated in a refusal to accord John VIII an Orthodox burial.³¹ Less obvious but just as significant was the way a succession of Byzantine scholars chose to leave for Italy. It was not only that it offered greater material rewards, it also provided more congenial conditions for the study of the classics than those prevailing at the imperial court in the last years of John VIII Palaiologos. Byzantine scholars and Italian humanists had found a sympathetic patron in Manuel II, but this changed with John VIII, who, unlike his father, did not concern himself with scholarship. His interest was more in theology, as his performance at the council of Ferrara Florence revealed. After his return from the council he relied heavily on George Scholarios, who was an expert in theology and philosophy and had advised the emperor at Florence. He encouraged Scholarios to clamp down on the cult of classical antiquity, which was the fashion among some Byzantine scholars. It was a potential threat to Orthodoxy, which Scholarios traced back to his erstwhile colleague George Gemistos Plethon. There had long been suspicions that the latter's devotion to Plato was rather more than academic. Scholarios began by attacking his Platonism on the grounds that it was incompatible with Christianity.³² In the course of debate it became all too clear that Plethon was critical of the Christian foundations of Byzantine civilisation. He contended that Christianity was to blame for the decline of Byzantium and that its only hope of salvation was a return to its Hellenic roots. Scholarios could not attack Plethon directly, but he was able to have a heretic who, like Plethon, had sought refuge in the Peloponnese hunted down and brutally executed for his beliefs. It is quite clear that Scholarios was seeking to discredit Plethon and members of his circle. In the process several Byzantine scholars found it expedient to retreat to Italy. Notwithstanding Plethon's hymns to the Olympian Gods, it has always been difficult to know how seriously to take the charge that he and his followers aimed to resuscitate paganism. Rather they were building on the kind of sentiments expressed by an eleventh-century bishop, who in a poem pleaded with Christ to save Plato and Plutarch despite being pagans, 'for both adhered very closely

to your precepts in both word and deed'.³³ In other words, paganism and Christianity had much in common. Plethon took this a step further, for he believed that Orthodoxy had obscured underlying religious truths celebrated by paganism. This was to his way of thinking Byzantium's tragedy. It was a cause of its decline. Only once the Byzantines rediscovered their Hellenic roots would revival become a possibility. This was tantamount to a rejection of the Byzantine vision.

IV

It was no coincidence that open questioning of the Byzantine vision only began after the return from the council of Ferrara Florence, because it soon became clear that the emperor had not achieved the near impossible by negotiating a Union of Churches, which preserved the complete integrity of the Orthodox Church. Before the council had even closed the emperor realised that the papacy regarded union as synonymous with the subordination of the Patriarchate of Constantinople to Rome.³⁴ He had, in other words, failed in his primary duty to defend Orthodoxy. He may well have encouraged George Scholarios's attack on Plethon as a way of deflecting criticism away from himself. But it did not prevent opponents of the union from envisaging the possibility of an Orthodox Church without the emperor as its protector, thus bringing out into the open another current of thought critical to the point of rejection of the Byzantine vision. It was not only symptomatic of a society at breaking point, but of a civilisation in the throes of dissolution. Emblematic was the increased prominence of *Hellene*, as the preferred term for Byzantine in place of the more usual *Roman*.³⁵ It suggested a different way of looking at Byzantium's past. For Plethon and his sympathisers it was tacit recognition that Byzantium was no longer the Christian Roman Empire and all that it implied. The anti-unionists used *Hellene* in a quite different way, as synonymous with being an Orthodox Christian, but without the imperial associations implied by the term *Roman*, which were at the heart of the Byzantine vision.

The use of *Hellene* to mean Byzantine was redolent of a lack of confidence in the imperial office, which the Emperor Constantine XI was left to confront. As he confessed, he felt himself increasingly isolated. He lost control over the situation in Constantinople. Even when it came to the defence of the city against the Turks, his role was problematic. Michel Balard has famously said that during the siege the emperor 'was everywhere and nowhere'.³⁶ In fact, he was camped between the walls at the Kharisios Gate close to Giovanni Giustiniani Longo, who held the neighbouring St Romanos Gate,³⁷ but he left

the conduct of the defence very largely to the Genoese *condottiere* and, on the Byzantine side, to Loukas Notaras. His lack of authority is all too apparent in his failure to intervene in that notorious incident just before the final assault, when Giustiniani threatened to kill Loukas Notaras.³⁸ On the eve of the final assault there was one last procession of icons and relics along the length of the city walls. The emperor then addressed those in charge of the defence, Latin and Greek, before celebrating mass for the last time in St Sophia. This was the final flicker of the Byzantine vision. However, it had been moribund for many years, kept alive by the hopes engendered by the miraculous deliverance of Constantinople in 1402, but increasingly the preserve of loyalists, such as George Sphrantzes, who remained true to the ideal underpinning Byzantine civilisation of a harmonious society revolving around the emperor. The fall of Constantinople left Sphrantzes in utter despair. So bitter an experience had it been that he failed to include any account of it in his history, despite being the only Byzantine historian to have lived through it. Also in despair, but for completely different reasons, was the historian Doukas. His history traced the failure of Byzantium to embrace union with the Latin Church, which in his opinion was the only realistic hope of preserving the Byzantine vision. This was a view shared by a few of the court elite, but most understood it as a gross betrayal of Orthodoxy. Far more sanguine was the historian Laonikos Khalkokondyles, who completely rejected the Byzantine vision, on the grounds that it was incompatible with the Hellenic genius. He paradoxically hailed the fall of Constantinople as an essential step in the emancipation of the Hellenic people from its Byzantine past. He was a disciple of George Gemistos Plethon and was expressing his master's views. These were ideas that would have resonance from the turn of the eighteenth century, but for the time being the fall of Constantinople rendered them irrelevant. It was another Greek historian, Michael Kritoboulos, who pointed the way to the immediate future. He embraced the Ottoman imperial vision, but in a way which envisaged a significant role for the Greek community under its patriarch. It reflected a sympathetic attitude towards the Ottomans, which was fairly widespread throughout Byzantine society. It rested on the belief that the Orthodox component of Byzantine civilisation would fare as well – if not better – under the Ottoman aegis, as it would under a Byzantine emperor.

It anticipated a vision which would eventually coalesce around the figure of Gennadios, the first Orthodox patriarch after the fall of Constantinople. It emphasised the notion of a gathered community with a duty to preserve Orthodoxy. It largely discarded any classical element, and with it went that balance of classical learning and Christian revelation which had ensured the originality and vitality of Byzantine civilisation. The Patriarch Gennadios

was more aware than most of what had been lost. He looked back with nostalgia and a degree of self-deception to his days at the court of the Emperor John VIII Palaiologos, when he presided over the imperial tribunal and gave judgements that he believed would be of value for future generations; when his preaching was the object of universal admiration and his opinion on a range of subjects much in demand.³⁹ He was in other words pretending that the Byzantine vision was still intact, just as he was able to convince himself that on the eve of its fall Constantinople was still the envy of the world. His lament was that it was then all swept away:

*Oh, best of native cities, how can we, your dearest children, survive your loss and how can you bear to be without us? Worse, how can we endure still to be alive, when you are beyond the reach of men? For though apparently still here, you are gone for ever.*⁴⁰

But the truth of the matter was that this vision of Byzantium had increasingly become a mirage and was already on the point of dissolution. The civilisation it inspired had become equally hollow: a matter of ritual and ceremonial. It purported to explain, celebrate and justify the ascendancy of an imperial elite over society, but this was of little consequence now that its members no longer wielded effective political power. All that was left was a charade intended as much as anything to attract foreign aid. It could no longer act as an inspiration for imperial revival, as it had done after the fall of Constantinople in 1204. Instead Byzantine civilisation was scattered to the winds. Byzantium's classical heritage passed to the West and its political traditions to Russia, while the Orthodox Patriarchate lived on in Constantinople and preserved what it could of its ecclesiastical inheritance. At best, the Byzantine vision survived in folktales, such as that of the marble emperor entombed in a state of suspended animation near the Golden Gate, an emperor who will one day awake to lead his people out of captivity.⁴¹

Notes

- 1 Scholarios, IV, 213.37–40.
- 2 Asutay-Effenberger, *Die Landmauer von Konstantinopel-Istanbul*, 127.
- 3 E. Basso, 'Genova e gli Ottomani nel XV secolo: gli "itali Teucrici" e il Gran Sultano', in *L'Europa dopo la caduta di Costantinopoli*, 375–409.
- 4 This is a theme of J. Harris, *Greek Emigrés in the West 1400–1520* (Camberley: Porphyrogenitus, 1995). For the fascinating career of one Greek, who died in Edinburgh, see J. Harris, 'Greeks at the papal curia in the fifteenth century: the case of George Vranas, bishop of Dromore and Elphin', in M. Hinterberger and

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- 5 F.W. Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929). A perusal of Ph.I. Koukoules, *Βυζαντινὸν βίος καὶ πολιτισμὸς*, 6 vols (Athens: Papazese, 1948–55) reveals the difficulties there are in recovering Greek popular culture in the Byzantine era. It is only from the seventeenth century that there are stronger foundations for its study. See C. Stewart, *Demons and the Devil: Moral Imagination in Modern Greek Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); K. Hartnup, 'On the Beliefs of the Greeks': *Leo Allatios and Popular Orthodoxy* [The Medieval Mediterranean, 54] (Leiden: Brill, 2004).
 - 6 S. Petmézas, 'L'organisation ecclésiastique sous les Ottomans', in *Conseils et mémoires de Synadinos prêtre de Serrès en Macédoine (XVIIe siècle)*, ed. and transl. P. Odorico (Paris: Association 'Pierre Belon', 1996), 487–549; D.G. Apostolopoulos, 'Du sultan au basileus? Dilemmes politiques du conquérant', in *Le patriarcat oecuménique de Constantinople aux XIVe–XVe siècles: rupture et continuité* [Dossiers byzantins, 7] (Paris: Centre des études byzantines, néohelléniques et sud-est européennes, 2007), 241–51.
 - 7 Cf. Zachariadou, *Δέκα τουρκικά έγγραφα για την Μεγάλη Εκκλησία (1483–1567)*, 41.
 - 8 Blanchet, *Georges-Gennadios Scholarios*, 157–8 and n. 107.
 - 9 Biedl, 'Matthaeus Camariotes', 337–9.
 - 10 See A. Cameron, 'Byzantium and the limits of orthodoxy', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 154 (2008), 129–52.
 - 11 M.J. Angold, 'The autobiographical impulse at Byzantium', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 52 (1998), 225–57; Hinterberger, *Autobiographische Traditionen*, 97–149.
 - 12 M.E. Mullett, 'Byzantium: a friendly society?', *Past & Present*, 118 (Feb. 1988), 3–24; id., 'Epistolography', in E. Jeffreys (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 882–93.
 - 13 A. Markopoulos, 'Education', *ibid.* 785–95; P.A. Agapitos, 'Teachers, pupils and imperial power in eleventh-century Byzantium', in *Pedagogy and Power: Rhetorics of Classical Learning* [Ideas in Context, 50] (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 170–91.
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- 16 S. Runciman, *The Last Byzantine Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); I. Ševčenko, 'The Palaeologan Renaissance', in W. Treadgold (ed.), *Renaissances before the Renaissance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984), 144–71; E.B. Fryde, *The Early Palaeologan Renaissance (1261–ca.1360)* [The Medieval Mediterranean, 27] (Leiden: Brill, 2000).
- 17 The most perceptive treatment of Theodore Metochites remains H.-G. Beck, *Theodoros Metochites. Die Krise des byzantinischen Weltbildes in 14. Jahrhundert* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1952).
- 18 O. Demus, 'The style of the Kariye Djami and its place in the development of Paleologan art', in P.A. Underwood, *The Kariye Djami* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), IV, 127.
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- 20 J. Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas* (London: Faith Press, 1964).
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- 28 Syropoulos, 'Mémoires', III, 28; 188.
- 29 Ibid. II, 2–3; 101–5; V. Laurent, 'Les droits de l'empereur en matière ecclésiastique. L'accord de 1380–82', *Revue des études byzantines*, 13 (1955), 1–7, 11–12.
- 30 Syropoulos, 'Mémoires', II, 4: 104.14–15.
- 31 Scholarios, III, 100; Gill, *Council of Florence*, 370; Djurić, *Crépuscule*, 381.
- 32 Livanos, 'The conflict between Scholarios and Plethon', 24–41; G. Karamanolis, 'Plethon and Scholarios on Aristotle', in K. Ierodiakonou (ed.), *Byzantine Philosophy and its Ancient Sources* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 253–82.

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- 37 Puscolo, *Constantinopolis*, iv. 309–14, in Ellissen, *Analekten der mittel- und neugriechischen Literatur*, III, 67.
- 38 Pertusi, *La caduta di Costantinopoli*, I, 153.
- 39 Scholarios, I, 288–90.
- 40 Ibid. 287.6–31.
- 41 Nicol, *Immortal Emperor*, 101–3. On the fall of Constantinople in popular Greek memory, see Papagianne, 'He Polis healo', 35–43.

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